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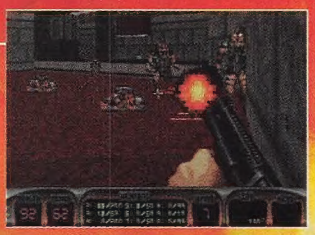

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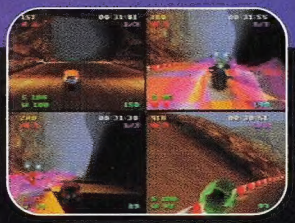

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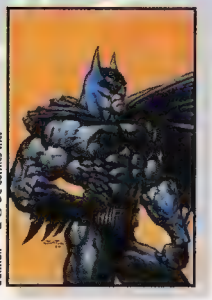
CHRISTMAS DAY

77 CONTENTS

Spawn™ & © Todd McFarlane Productions Inc.

ON THE COVER
Spawn was painted by fantasy artist Fred Fields. Flip to page 68 to see what Spawn creator Todd McFarlane has planned for the big guy!



Batman™ & © DC Comics Inc.

Batman was painted by British artist Simon Bisley. To see what's in store for your favorite Bat-titles next year, check out the massive 1998 preview starting on page 76.

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193 IMAGE
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198 CHASE
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EXCLUSIVE

Holy half offers! Here's your *only* chance to get the exclusive *Nightwing* #1/2 comic, featuring a killer Nightwing story by the Flying Grayson's regular team of Chuck Dixon and Scott McDaniel. Fly to page 144 for details.

"HEY, RALF—I CAN BE CONAN, TOO."

Photo: Linda Coleman

YEAR WE GO AGAIN!

Because this issue comes *after* issue #76 and *before* issue #78 does not make this just another monthly installment of *Wizard*. This is an event. A BIG event for us. It took months and months (in some cases, over a year) of planning and plotting, following up, details, details, details, but we did it. We pulled it off. In my opinion, it's the best package we've ever delivered. The Alex Ross comic took over 18 months from our first conversation with him to the finished product you now hold in your hands. And what a spectacular job. Thanks, Alex!

To this day, I can't believe we got a Simon Bisley cover—and we had it in early! Simon bought into all the fake deadline dates I gave him. What a bloke! (Thanks, Simon.) And we've also got a great Fred Fields Spawn cover.

We've been talking to DC for years and years about doing #1/2 offers, and we did it! *Nightwing* #1/2 can finally be yours. Thanks, Paul and Patty. (That's DC gurus Paul Levitz and Patty Jeres.)

We've got some great features in here too. There's a 1998 Reading Preview Guide that reveals what's happening in your favorite comics next year. We pick the best that 1997 had to offer in regards to artists, creators, comics, characters and more, as well as presenting a number of questions for 1998. And of course, there's the Q&A with Todd McFarlane himself. You'll love it.

All in all, it's a tremendous issue. I hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed the culmination and execution of some of our dreams.

I just got back from a West Coast tour to see Top Cow, WildStorm and Awesome. By the looks of it, the comics industry is going to be a lot of fun in 1998, and boy, does Jim Lee owe me now—he actually overslept and missed the meeting! (I had to tell everyone, Jim).

Wizard will have it all before it breaks.

See ya next year!

Gareb S. Shamus

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Stuff you don't ever read...

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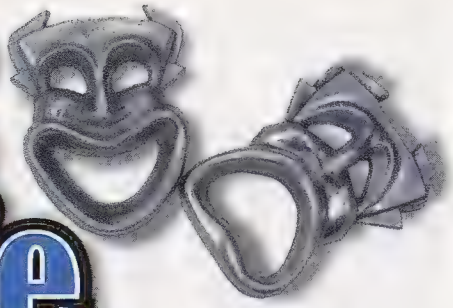


'Wizard' reaches for the stars in its very own 'Casting Call'

Chris Hutson/Foto Fantasies

PAT McCALLUM, Editor-in-Chief

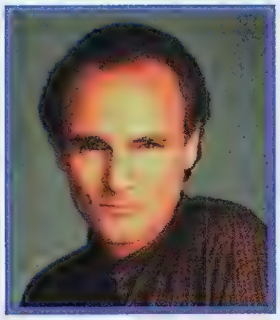
Though now dead, *Wizard*'s big kahuna led a lifetime battle with rectal halitosis. Though he'd have to switch to an all-Taco Bell diet, Fred Savage ("Working") is our man.

BRIAN CUNNINGHAM, Editor

The role of *Wizard*'s young hairless editor falls to Larry Wilcox (Jon Baker from "CHiPs"). And just as Larry enjoys his motorcycle's comfy upholstery, Brian likes his leather. A lot.

JOE YANARELLA, Senior Managing Editor

Portraying the oldest man in *Wizard*'s editorial stable is the hard-nosed, no-nonsense Ed Lauter ("The Longest Yard"), who has exactly 13 more hairs on his head than Joe does.



ANDREW KARDON, Assistant Editor

Idiot-savant and one-time Miss Teen USA Andrew Kardon would be portrayed perfectly by Joe Regalbuto ("Murphy Brown"). Andrew's also been known to hock the "Garden Weasel" to help feed his rampant drug abuse.

GREG ORLANDO, Copy Editor

The newest member of the *Wizard* editorial staff, Greg has yet to make any true contribution to the book. If he doesn't shape up soon, we'll get his movie look-alike, Richard Roundtree ("Shaft"), to replace him.

Courtesy of MTV

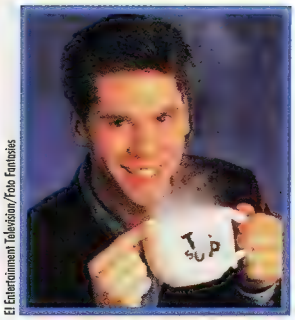
MARC WILKOFSKY, Copy Editor

While Marc *still* insists that he should play himself and the movie should be a musical, we've seen him sing and dance. Yep, we know better. Anyway, Frank Hope, host of MTV's "Oddville," has just the right amount of quirkiness to play Wilko.

All *Wizard* staff photos except Jon Warren by Paul Schiraldi. All celebrity photos, unless otherwise noted, are from Everett Collection.

JIM McLAUCHLIN, Senior Staff Writer

McLauchlin, *Wizard*'s teen heartthrob and voted "Most Likely to Die in Battle with a Giant Squid," would come alive under the skills of Curtis Armstrong, better known as Booger from "Revenge of the Nerds."

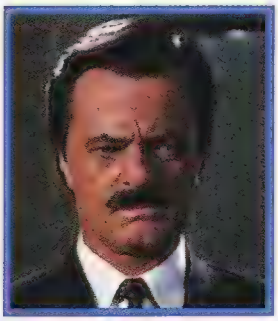


E! Entertainment Television/Foto Fantasies

MATTHEW SENREICH, Staff Writer

Narrowly avoiding being portrayed by one of the lovable child-actors that infest Hollywood like a cancer, 12-year-old Matthew hits the big screen as the E! network's "Talk Soup" host John Henson.

Courtesy of Jon Warren



JON WARREN, Senior Price Guide Editor

Though now serving time for mercilessly beating a circus midget to death, Tennessee-based Jon Warren would be immortalized by Vegas showstopper and "Naked Gun 2 1/2" villain Robert Goulet.

© Jim Henson Association/Foto Fantasies

LARS PEARSON, Price Guide Manager

When ILM proved too expensive to animate the Norwegian Assassin Lars Pearson, one word proved to be our salvation: muppet. Scooter, Kermit's right-hand guy on "The Muppet Show," was just our soulless felt plaything.

© 1986 Warner Bros. Inc./Foto Fantasies

BOB MARSHALL, Price Guide Editor

Though he'd have to bathe in patchouli oil to match the experience that is Bob Marshall, Matthew Laborteaux (that lovable scamp Albert from "Little House on the Prairie") would bring *Wizard*'s undead price guide Editor to life.

PHIL COLLIGAN, Assistant Price Guide Editor

Ex-porn star Phil Colligan may be a human petri dish for dozens of skin-blistering infectious diseases, but we figure with a little skin-rash special effects, "Friends" star David Schwimmer can get a little "friendlier," and tackle the role beautifully.

© 1965 ABC/Foto Fantasies

STEVE BLACKWELL, Design Manager

Steve's all man. Be it driving his big manly truck, combing his big manly hair or chasing raccoons away from his garbage cans with a stick, only bad-ass Lee Majors (preferably from his younger "Big Valley" days) could handle this role.

© 1994 Paramount Pictures

ARLENE SO, Designer

Ex-con and overall bad-seed Arlene So would be proudly brought to the big screen courtesy of Jacqueline Kim (Sulu's daughter from "Star Trek Generations"), though she'd have to learn the fine arts of pantsing and monkeyjacking.

CINDY EMMERT, Designer

In between practicing the black arts and discreetly shooting the neighborhood children with her pellet gun, Cindy could probably convince Camryn Manheim ("The Practice") to play her.

TESSLYN PANDARAKALAM, Production Assistant

When not being tricked by Superman into saying her cool name backwards, Ms. Pandarakalam would be played by Sarita Choudhury ("Mississippi Masala") in our flick.

© 1997 Comedy Central

DAN REILLY, Art Assistant

Casting patchwork abomination Dan Reilly proved slightly difficult. But when Dr. Octopus declined the job, finding a replacement was fairly easy—fellow imaginary character Officer Barbrady from "South Park" fit the bill nicely.

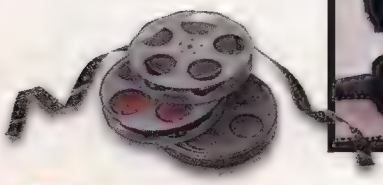
KEITH WILLIAMS, Research Assistant

While *Wizard* thug Keith Williams may miss the premiere of the *Wizard* movie due to a previous engagement of cleaning up roadkill as part of his community service, punk actor Corey Feldman ("Lost Boys") would capture his essence on screen.

© Paramount Pictures/Fox Fantasies

PETER FLOOD, Research Assistant

Sexual deviant Peter Flood has all the inquisitive enthusiasm actor Wil Wheaton displayed as the whiny brat Wesley on "Star Trek: The Next Generation." And, just like Wes, Peter has a superfluous third nipple.



JENNIFER CAVALLO, Administrative Assistant

Though born a man, Jen "Jake" Cavallo would be played to a "T" by Danica McKellar, that Winnie chick who filled Kevin's dreams in "The Wonder Years."

Someone has taken their love of *sequels* one step too far.

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MAGIC WORDS

Hey, I Know That Guy!

Yeah, you probably do. To celebrate the over-the-top gonzo journalism that is the *Wizard* Year-Ender here in "Magic Words," we decided to solicit letters from a baker's dozen of your favorite comic book potentates (Look it up!). Nothing but letters from your favorite comic plotters, planners and pencilers populate these pulse-pounding pages. And since I'm getting alliterative already, we'll lead off with the Lord Big-High Mucky-Muck of All Things Comics Himself, the man known simply as "The Man." Ladies and gentlemen...

Hi, Jim,
After writing a squintillion "Soapbox" columns since the '60s, this is just what I need: A chance to write again! But hey—who can say "no" to a request from *Wizard*? So I'll tackle something that may surprise you—comic books!

Some yo-yos are predicting the end of comics because of inroads made by the Internet, video games, television and all the varied forms of interactive media. But that doesn't cut any ice with me!

I'm old, so I remember when TV started. Everyone claimed it was the death knell of books and movies. Who'd read anything when they could be entertained by the boob tube? Who'd *pay* to go to the movies when they could watch the stuff at home for free? Well, today the book biz is bigger than ever. And hit movies are no longer pulling in just millions—they're approaching billions!

So get with it, doomsayers! Comic books are the most perfect form of entertainment created since the ever-popular you-know-what! And they'll be around as long as people love colorful, exciting, unpredictable, inexpensive, easily portable, highly collectible, perfect blendings of story, art and wild imagination. Bet on it!

And if I'm proven wrong 100 years from now, just let me know. I'll apologize!

Stan Lee
Publisher, Marvel Comics

I guess all I can say here is, "'Nuff said."

Jim,
I'd bet that 75 percent of us who read comics and read *Wizard* have been into comics for a long time. We're the believers. We're the hard-cores. But we don't last forever. We've got to get new people continually coming in to grow. I'm at a bit of a loss as to how to cultivate new comic fans. Where do new comic readers come from? That's what I want to know.

Whoever has the answer to this question are the people who have become comic readers in the last year or two. I want to hear from you. I want to know what got you in so we can do more of it. Maybe if this industry gets enough response, we can put two and two together and figure out how to get more people reading and enjoying comics.

I know there are a few new readers out there. I'd like to make that into an army of new readers. So write in and let me know how.

Todd McFarlane
President,
Todd McFarlane Productions

Sounds interesting. So to all you newbies out there who are new to the comic scene: Write to "Magic Words" and let us know what drew you into comics. As per usual, I'll read all your letters. And I'll pass along any letters addressing this topic to Mr. McFarlane so he can get your thoughts also. Todd's lookin' forward to them and even promises "a really neat autographed Spawny thing" to 10 randomly selected readers whose letters he pulls. So grab a drawin' stick and let us know today.

Jim,
About 10 or 15 years ago, there was a big contest ad from the makers of Clark bars

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that ran in the centerfold of most comics. The winner of the contest got to be featured as a character in a comic book. My questions are: Who won, and in which comics did they appear? I've been wondering this ever since the ads ran all those years ago.

And while I'm at it, would you guys hire somebody that has some back issues that you can refer to? When you pointed out significant events in your "Heroes Return" special edition, the "moments" were just plain pathetic. How could it be that Lee and Kirby gave us *no* memorable moments in their 102 issues of *Fantastic Four*? Somebody needs some serious history lessons around there!

Erik Larsen
Creator, *Savage Dragon*

Albert Ortega

Erik refers to a promotion that ran in the summer of 1978 in Marvel and DC books, and several other comics (shown below). And whereas I have much love for you, Erik, and much love for the Dragon, I must confess that you have now torqued me off. You've stumped the band. After consulting Marvel, DC, Clark Bar America, Hershey (the company that bought out Leaf, then the parent company of Clark), The Chocolate Manufacturers' Association and Confectioner magazine, I still have no answer.

Therefore, I call upon the highest power available to me: the collective wisdom of Wizard Fans United. Someone out there has to know. So write to "Magic Words" and let me know. Give me a full explanation of what the winner actually got, and please include some form of proof. The first one to send in the true answer will receive...I dunno, but I'll send you something neat. And a Clark bar.

Larsen has challenged us. We rise to the challenge. We go with God. We cannot be stopped.

YOU COULD WIN A TRIP TO GOTHAM AND APPEAR IN A SUPERHERO COMIC BOOK!

Okay, all you characters out there, here's your best chance to be a real character. Comic-book style.

You don't have to buy anything. Or do anything, except to mail us the famous Clark Bar Superhero Sweepstakes entry blank with your name and address.

You know what could be in it for you. Just read on.

FIRST PRIZE

If you're lucky enough to win the first prize, Clark will fly you and your family (limit of four people) to New York City and back.

You'll stay for three days and two nights. All expenses paid.

While you are at that of the Museum of Comic Art, or visiting Marvel Comics headquarters where your book is being made.

book. You'll be part of the action, right along with one of Marvel's famous superheroes.

You'll have plenty of free time in Gotham, too, for seeing the Statue of Liberty or taking boat rides, or just looking up at tall buildings a lot and saying "Wow!"

And, when your comic-book adventure is published, we'll send you 15 copies for your family and friends. They'll be proud to know a famous person like you!

SECOND PRIZE

If you're one of 50 second-prize winners, you'll get your own famous Superhero Weekend. Only summer. Wonder Woman, Superman, Captain Marvel, and your favorite Marvel comic book superheroes will be there. Plus, you'll enjoy the power of the watchers and social media.

with full-color superhero pictures, and would normally sell for 19¢ to $23.95.

THIRD PRIZE

If you're one of 100 third-prize winners, we'll send you a year's subscription to your favorite DC or Marvel comic book. The incredible Hulk, Iron Man, Marvel.

Green Lantern, The Justice Society, Captain America, Red Sonja, Fantastic Man, Wonder Woman, you name it. Even Little Lulu.

So find yourself a pen or pencil, fill in the entry blank (please print), and mail your entry to us before November 1, 1978.

It could mean you as famous as the famous Clark Bars.

BE A WINNER ALL YEAR LONG, WITH WRAPPERS FROM FAMOUS CLARK BARS!

Okay. What you just read about was a contest. This isn't. What this is, is a terrific way to get famous Superhero pictures any time you want them. By collecting wrappers from any of the famous Clark and Hollowy products: Clark, Crispy, Jaunty, Crunch, Eagle, Peanut Butter Log, Milk Duds, No Name, or Black Cow.

Here's what you can get. The order blank is on the next page.

CLARK

THE FAMOUS CLARK BAR SUPERHERO SWEEPSTAKES!

© 1978 Marvel Comics Group

Dear Wizard,

I was gonna complain that you guys never cover Acclaim Comics—Valiant Heroes, the Young Readers line or *Classics Illustrated* Study Guides—but that would sound kinda whiny coming from me, wouldn't it?

I could use the opportunity to mention that your readers might enjoy articles on how funny Christopher Priest and MD Bright's *Quantum and Woody* is, or how stunning Sal Velluto's art on *Bloodshot* is, or the poignancy of *Troublemakers* and the unexpected fun of *Trinity Angels* and *Magnus*, but that would sound like hype, wouldn't it?

I might mention that there's a million people playing the *Turok* video game and you guys haven't said "boo" about it, but that would come across as me ass-kissing my parent company, wouldn't it?

Instead, I'll tell you that *Wizard* really does keep improving every year. Your articles and design all convey a cynical sense of fun, and if you keep those Casting Calls, photo funnies and homemade toys coming, I'll keep enjoying the mag and so will everyone here at Acclaim Comics.

A personal wish, though, if you wouldn't mind—could you PLEASE keep putting the X-Men on the cover, whether there's an article inside or not? I can't get enough of those wacky mutants. That's all: More X-Men covers. Article or not. Thanks.

Fabian Nicieza
President and Publisher,
Acclaim Comics

Well, then, I guess you're happy with the "Quantum and Woody" strip we ran last month. We're happy with it too. I think that Q&W is good for some great big hoo-hahs every month.

And no sweat—we'll keep those X-Men covers coming. You can look for Chris Bachalo's rendition of the X-Men in Wizard #79.

Attention, Big Jim M.,

Comic readership has been falling off. Let's build it back up. If you're a store owner with a stack of unsold Malibu comics in the back of your shop, take these books you can't give away...and *give* them away. Give them to children's shelters. Donate them to prison literacy programs. These books are now tax deductions at full cover price.

Do you carry *No Mercy Comics* or *Verotik*? Both companies have famous rock stars behind them. Call your local record store and work out a cross-promotion. Bring in the Poison and Danzig fans.

Give some unsold books to your local tattoo parlor in exchange for a sign on the wall telling their customers how to become your customers. If they're into tattoos, then they're into art. And comics are full of art. Drag in some new blood (Literally!). Generally speaking, tattoo fans love Boneyard Press books.

These are all simple, easy steps a store owner can take to pump up the industry and their own store. I'm sure you folks can take it from there.

Hart D. Fisher
Publisher, Boneyard Press

Dear God in Heaven, did we have to bring up tattoos again?

But Hart brings up a good point. There are a billion and two things a store can do with unsold comics, most of which are very beneficial. It's just a matter of doing them.

On a lighter note...

Marty Shamus

Dear Wizard,

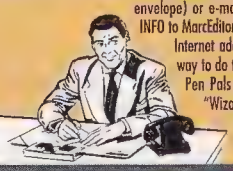
One question: Why do you guys keep stealing my bathrobe every year at the San Diego Comicon? Doesn't that Shamus guy pay you enough to buy a robe of your own? It's getting kinda old and I'm freezing my ass off over here. It's very frustrating getting out of a shower and having no robe to put on. I'm getting goosebumps in places I didn't even know I had places. They're nice, personalized terry cloth robes that say "Jim" on them, and I'm getting sick of you stealing them. Cut it out. Go get your own damn robe. Thanks.

Jim Lee
President,
WildStorm Productions

See next letter.

Hey! It's Pen Pals
Special 'Pseudo-Celebrity' Edition

Make a friend! Send your name, address, age, gender and three favorite titles to Pen Pals, c/o the "Magic Words" address on page 24 (put your age on the envelope) or e-mail your REGULAR ADDRESS INFO to MarcEditor@aol.com. If you want your Internet address listed instead, the only way to do this is to post your info in the Pen Pals board on America Online's "Wizard World" forum (keyword: Wizard; look under "Wizard Message Boards").



Dear Mr. McLauchlin,

Noting your position at *Wizard* as one of great power, and keeping your lofty yet aloof nature in mind, I admit I was quite shaken by your phone message the other day. After all, are you not the man who can make or break careers with a mere mention (or lack thereof), or destroy entire companies with a stroke of your keyboard? What could you have possibly wanted?

I didn't know. So I contacted Jimmy Palmiotti, my best friend and co-founder of Event Comics (proud publishers of the two best comics in the universe, *Ash* and *Painkiller*

P E N P A L S

Lee Majors
Age: 18 Sex: Male
242 Radonna Dr.
Smithville, TN 37166
Likes: *Wolverine, Spawn,* Japanese animation

Alan Simmons
Age: 16 Sex: Male
Rt. 2, Box 145B
Falls of Rough, KY 40119
Likes: *The Tick, Spider-Man, X-Men*

Chris Carter
Age: 14 Sex: Male
1405 Everett St.
Las Vegas, NV 89101
Likes: *Spawn, X-Men, Green Goblin*

Billy Carter
Age: 16 Sex: Male
713 Denrock Avenue
Dalhart, TX 79022
Likes: *The X-Files, X-Men, Spawn*

Joseph Kennedy
Age: 17 Sex: Male
31 W. Grandview Ave.
Sierra Madre, CA 91024
Likes: *Gunsmith Cats, Uncanny X-Men, Gen13*

Tony Edwards
Age: 17 Sex: Male
709 Rippling Stream Rd.
Durham, NC 27704
Likes: all Image titles

Kevin Smith
Age: 18 Sex: Male
11200 Linden Lane
Port Richey, FL 34668
Likes: all X-titles, *Starman, Hitman*

Jane), and told him of your call. Together we comprised a list! Jimmy and I are quite fond of lists. Here goes:

Top 10 Reasons Why Jim McLauchlin Called:

10) Selling subscriptions to *Wizard*.
9) Inviting us to his wedding.
8) To complain about his cramps. Again.
7) Just checking to see if we're still in business.
6) To thank us for the hookers.
5) Wants us to switch over to AT&T.
4) To brag about his prowess at last week's *Wizard* office orgy.
3) "Top Ten Artists" list payola check bounced.
2) Wrong number (Jim Lee's is just one digit different).

And the No. 1 reason Jim McLauchlin called:

1) Wants us to send more hooch!

Please don't hurt me.

Joe Quesada
Co-founder of Event Comics (proud publishers of the two best comics in the universe, *Ash* and *Painkiller Jane*)

P.S. Jimmy says "thanks" for the personalized terry cloth robe you gave him in San Diego.

Looks like you forgot No. 11, Joe: Just looking for your sister's number.
And I'm NOT getting married.
P.S. Tell Jimmy he's welcome.

Albert Ortega

Dear Jim:

Just saw a new commercial from the folks at Snapple.

Snapple, you may recall, was a small iced tea company. They had three or four different flavors. As they gained popularity, they hired Wendy, a.k.a. "The Snapple Fat Lady," who touted that Snapple made "the world's greatest iced tea." She embodied all that was good about iced tea, how refreshing and simple it was, and she had a sense of humor about it all.

Then, a large corporation bought the small Snapple company for about a zillion dollars. Soon, we were besieged with hundreds of Snapples, which everyone knew was the same iced tea with about a billion different labels.

Guess what? People stopped drinking Snapple. Slowly, people's desire to drink iced tea at all started to erode. And now, the Snapple division of the large corporation is teetering on bankruptcy.

The other night, I saw the commercial. Two representatives for the corporation (a man dressed in black with a bad hair weave and a short man who mutters to himself) went to a South Seas island to find The Snapple Fat Lady in the hopes of rekindling the original spirit that made the company wonderful in the first place. At the end of the commercial, The Snapple Fat Lady returns and the island's cannibals eat the two corporation guys.

Do you think anything like this could happen in comics?

Just wondering.

Jeph Loeb
Publisher, Awesome Entertainment

P.S. If you print this, I'll send you a case of Snapple.

For those of you now thinking that Mr. Loeb is just a nutty comic publisher with a bad haircut—you're right. But you may want to go back and re-read this story. However, this time, think "Marvel Comics" instead of "Snapple iced tea." Think "The ol' Lee-and-Kirby way" instead of "Snapple Fat Lady." The story comes out a little different.

P.S. Sorry, but my incredibly rigid code of ethics prevents me from accepting gifts of this nature. Now as to No. 3 and No. 6 in the Quesada letter—those are gray areas.

Courtesy of Christina Z.

Dear Wizard,

I write a few comics, and the topic of women writing in a male-dominated industry often arises.

How can a woman justifiably write in an industry with gratuitous bikini shots, over-inflated breasts and muscles that real men could never work out? Isn't that exploiting the human body? Or setting insane standards of what a person should look like? I don't think so.

As a woman who grew up in braces, glasses and wearing... um...less-than-chic fashion, I find it lovely to look at a beautiful body—a man's or a woman's—and see a good story unfold. It's funny how some readers can accept outrageous comic *stories*, yet not outrageous *measurements*.

The deal is that some of us like to live vicariously through these character's lives, and yes, their "perfect" bodies. With more women reading comics these days, I hope they see that mainstream comics are harmless, and learn to appreciate comics as an artform and hopefully, a good read.

Christina Z.
Co-writer, *Witchblade*

And those of you who like that vicarious life should continue to live it. Judging from what sells, Z., I'd say lotsa readers agree with you.

Dear Jim:

In e-mail, at conventions, and even in a few letters from Australia, people have

PENPALS

Josh Pope
Age: 13 Sex: Male
P.O. Box 388
Goodlettsville, TN 37070
Likes: *Spawn*, Spider-titles, *X-Men*

Billy Carter (another one)
Age: 15 Sex: Male
1101 S. McLeansboro
Benton, IL 62812
Likes: *Spawn*, anime/manga, almost anything

Michael Kaluta
Age: 18 Sex: Male
R.R. 1, Dunvegan, Ontario,
Canada K0C 1J0, Box 66
Likes: *Sandman*, *Spawn*

Jim Le
Age: 15 Sex: Male
2208 North College Ave.
Tempe, AZ 85281-1107
Likes: Jim Lee titles, *Aliens*, *Gen13*

Angela Tucci
Age: 23 Sex: Female
4094 Overton Crossing
Memphis, TN 38127
Likes: X-titles, *The X-Files*, *Hulk*

Billy E. Williams
Age: 29 Sex: Male
1133 Moody Ave., Apt. 6
Knoxville, TN 37920
Likes: all Verotik titles, manga, anime

Jade
Age: 15 Sex: Female
2069 Hidden Valley
Crown Point, IN 46307
Likes: *Spawn*, *The Crow*

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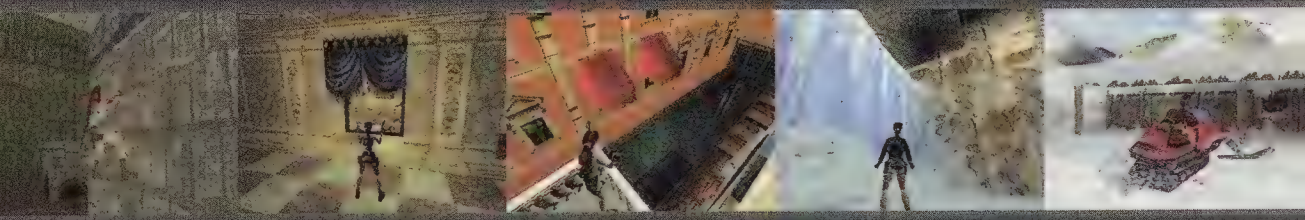

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EIDOS INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

suggested that *Avengers* should be set up like *JLA*—with powerful members like Firelord, the Silver Surfer, Iron Man and even Dark Phoenix. We're not doing that, for two reasons:

First, the Avengers aren't the JLA. The JLA is a *league*, a collection of superstar individuals. But the Avengers is a *team*—the best working combination of talents, abilities and personalities. Sort of like an all-star team, which isn't made up of the nine best batters, but the best pitcher, the best catcher, the best shortstop and so on. I'm enjoying Grant Morrison's take on the JLA as much as anyone—but Avengers and JLA are different concepts.

Second, I don't think it's a good idea to aim for success by imitating someone else. Too many people have tried to make whatever book they're doing more like whatever's topping the charts. The result is that one group of readers has more books than they can possibly follow aimed at them, and readers who want something different end up with slim pickings. I think we should look for what each book can do that no other book can. *Avengers* shouldn't be an imitation of *JLA*, *X-Men*, or any other book—it should be *Avengers*, done as well as it possibly can be. And that's what we're shooting for.

But hey, Grant—if and when we get to do *Avengers/JLA*, I've got a doozy of a set-up for it...

Kurt Busiek
Writer, *Astro City*, *Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *Thunderbolts*

Brian Smith

Yeah, that's all well and good, but unless I get to see Avengers artist George Pérez (below, left) in a gratuitous bikini shot, I ain't interested.

Hey, Jim!

Year-end extravaganza, huh? What'll I write? A "Your Savior's So Fat..." joke list? Recipe for Bar-B-Q reindeer? Blind Al's Kwanzaa carols? Nah. It's been a good year, so I'll do the gratitude list:

Respect to my writing partner boys at Creative Differences: James Felder, Ben Raab and Matt Idelson. These guys got me started and keep me going.

A healthy brown-nosing to Marvel Editor-in-Chief Bob Harras for his support and guidance and for not firing me when I said, "Foggy Nelson is the mystery third Summers brother!"

Thanks to Marvel editors Mark Powers and Jaye Gardner, and special props to assistants like Paul Tutrone, Dan Hosek and Jason Liebig, who make editorial look good.

Thanks, Mom and Dad, for buying me my first comic and teaching me how to read it.

The most gratitude I can muster to my beautiful wife Gina, who was gracious enough to say "I do" this summer, thus proving that lifelong comic geeks *can* get chicks! You're the only woman I know who can make a writer forget how to use words.

And a big thankin' to all you readers! I wouldn't have enjoyed any of the opportunities I've had this year without your comments, criticisms and support.

Joe Kelly
Writer, *Deadpool* and *X-Men*

And thanks for being the first guy published in this column to use the word "props."

But fer cryin' out loud, who told you this was an Oscars acceptance speech? Better go back and write some more—I think you forgot to thank the Academy and "all the little people" who helped you along the way.

Geez. Give a guy an X-title and he starts running off at the mouth.

Dear Wizard,

I'd like to address a subject that I'm sure afflicts many comic professionals: Attention deficit disorder. Many pros have this condition, but are not aware of it, and cannot understand why they have problems meeting deadlines. People with A.D.D. also deal with overwhelming feelings of unsuccessfulness, and have trouble concentrating and keeping a steady thought proce...

...Omigod! I love that TV commercial! Oh, my butt is sore from sitting here and drawing. I'll just get up and go eat some of those leftov...Oh! my missing sock! I was wondering whe...boy, Spielberg was a huge success at age 23. Why can't I do that? Aw, man—I'll never be able to draw like Adam Hughes...maybe I'll just go into oyster farming...Hmmm...that Palmiotti guy has a really big pen...jeez...howcum I'm always #11 on the "*Wizard* Top 10 Artists" list?...Hi, Jim. Was that letter due yesterday?!

Amanda Conner
Easily Distracted Penciller of *Vampirella*

Yep. It was. But A.D.D. is nothing compared to what we've got in this next letter...

Albert Ortega

Dear Wizard,

I was at a convention once and a kid brought me a copy of *X-Factor* #90 to autograph. Now, I make it a policy never to sign books that I didn't write, and since my last *X-Factor* was #89, obviously this fell into that category. So I said to the kid, "I'm sorry, I didn't write this," and handed it back to him.

PENPALS

Carnage
Age: 23 Sex: Male
P.O. Box 3016, Easton, PA 18045
Likes: anything with Carnage, *Aroknis*, *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*

John Walker
Age: 13 Sex: Male
1635 Cattlemon Ct.
Semmes, AL 36575
Likes: any X-titles or Spider-titles

Thor M. Atwood
Sex: Male
P.O. Box 204
Arlington, WA 98223 0204
Likes: all *Star Wars* titles, *Shi*, *Thor*

Jonathan Carter
Age: 17 Sex: Male
P.O. Box 140328
Edgewater, CO 80214
Likes: *Sandman*, *Death*, *Enigma*

Dr. Frankenfurter
Age: 15 Sex: Male
1538 James Ave.
Redwood City, CA 94062
Likes: *Sandman*, *Love and Rockets*, *The Crow*

Jim Kirk
Age: 23 Sex: Male
JEDI8687@juno.com
Likes: *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, *Spawn*, *Kingdom Come*

Richard Grayson
Age: 16 Sex: Male
bludhaven@hotmail.com
Likes: Batman titles, Superman titles, *Adventures in the DC Universe*

WHAT ARE THE SECRET CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THESE TWO TEAMS?

	BURNOUT	
FAIRCHILD	LYNCH	CHANG
FREEFALL	DANE	CALLAHAN
GRUNGE	CASH	SLAYTON
RAINMAKER		CRAY

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THIS IS THE ONE NO WILDSTORM FAN CAN AFFORD TO MISS!

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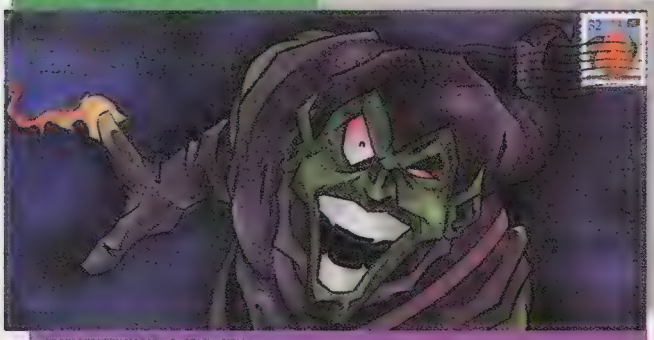
image®

LETTER ART

Fans who have their letter art printed this month will each receive a copy of *The Flash Secret Files* autographed by penciler Kenny Martinez and inker Anibal Rodriguez, plus a copy of this issue of *Wizard* signed by the entire *Wizard* creative staff! The creator of the best envelope wins a signed Flash sketch by Martinez and Rodriguez, plus the signed comic and signed *Wizard* issue! (Thanks a lot for the goods, guys!) Artists: Please include a clearly printed return address and **a list of characters depicted** on the **back** of your envelope. Good luck!

THE PRIZE

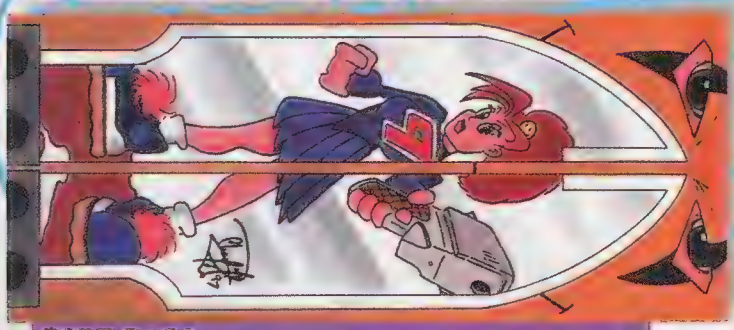
envelope of the month



GREEN GOBLIN
Shaun Jennings Norfolk, England

DREAMING OF THE ENDLESS
Jim Lim Columbus, OH

IRON MAN VS. MAGNETO
Paolo Rivera Daytona Beach, FL



BODY BAGS
Chad Wm. Porter Weston, Ontario, Canada

we're in the home stretch...

With complete confidence, he handed it back to me and corrected me, saying, "*Wizard* said you did."

"Uhm...I think I know whether I wrote an issue or not," I told him gently. I slid it back across the table to him.

"But...*Wizard* said you did," he repeated, just a hint of urgency in his voice.

I opened the cover to the credits. "See? Look. My name's not here. I didn't write it."

"But *Wizard* said you did!" Rising panic rampaged through him.

"Well, *Wizard* was wrong. That can happen, you know."

It was as if I'd told a 3-year-old there was no Santa. His face paled. His eyes had that "deer in the headlights" look. And I realized that I had just knocked the underpinnings out from under one of the constants of his world. No, no! *Wizard* could not have been wrong about the writer of *X-Factor* #90. Because if *Wizard* had made an error about that, why, then...there might be other errors as well! And this kid had staked his entire peace of mind on the firm belief that *Wizard* was never, ever wrong! His reality tumbled down around him.

And then he took the unsigned comic, slid it back into its protective wrapper, and staggered away into a world that was unknown and terrifying.

Don't ever be wrong again. The mental health of fandom may depend on it.

Peter David
Writer of Stuff

Okay, Pete. No problem. All mistakes are hereby forbidden. Maybe now it'll be safe to go out.

I know it's safe to go in. So that's just what I'll do. Until next month, and a return to what passes for a "normal" letters column, I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin

Jim McLauchlin likes his peanut butter chunky and his women smooth.

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VENGEANCE DAY

The Manhattan Empire is celebrating its most beloved holiday--*Vengeance Day*. But Rosco J. Rodent is not filled with the spirit of this special day. "You've got 365 days a year to settle the score with somebody--why be so obvious and do it on a designated date?" Although a convincing observation, Rosco's opinion is beginning to change once he finds himself the target of a multitude of festive assassins. Catch all the full color action in issue 5 & 6 of...

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Rat Bastard
TM & ©1997
Cliff Galbraith

The Next 'Image'?

Madureira, Campbell, Ramos form new comic imprint

Is this the second coming of Image Comics? Could be. Once again, a wave of fan-favorite talent is heading out on its own, just as the Image founders did in 1992.

J. Scott Campbell (*Gen13*), **Joe Madureira** (*Uncanny X-Men*) and **Humberto Ramos** (*Impulse*) have left their high-profile assignments for new creator-owned properties and a new comic imprint all their own. But this time, the imprint is a *part* of Image that goes by a name all its own: Cliffhanger.

Cliffhanger will be a sub-imprint of WildStorm Productions, existing as a separate entity, similar to WildStorm's Homage Comics line. Cliffhanger comics will carry the Image logo, and feature all-new creator-owned projects. The line debuts with Campbell's ***Danger Girl*** in March, followed by Madureira's ***Battle Chasers*** in April and Ramos' ***Crimson*** in May. For the first year of the imprint, only these three creators' titles will be Cliffhangers. After that, the imprint may just open itself to new talent.

"A cliffhanger is an event in which the outcome is unknown until the end," said Madureira. "Our books will feature a lot of that. And I guess you can say our venture into creator-owned books could be called a cliffhanger, too."

WildStorm President **Jim Lee** enticed Madureira, Campbell and Ramos with a new imprint set up specifically to showcase the young artists' talents. "These three guys were already gravitating towards one another," said Lee. "And I figured that WildStorm would be a good place for them to eventually gravitate to. Since their books didn't fit into the WildStorm Universe, and Homage tends to have creator-owned books that are more retro in feel, I thought a new line would capture attention in the best possible way. I think Cliffhanger is clearly mainstream, yet outside the superhero realm."

Cliffhanger superheroes will definitely be in short supply, as *Danger Girl* is a spy/intrigue story, *Battle Chasers* is a fantasy-based tale and *Crimson* features vampires. "All of our books will still have a superhero flavor," said Madureira. "Our main characters will all do amazing and extraordinary things like superheroes. But the settings are ones that aren't filled with superhero characters."

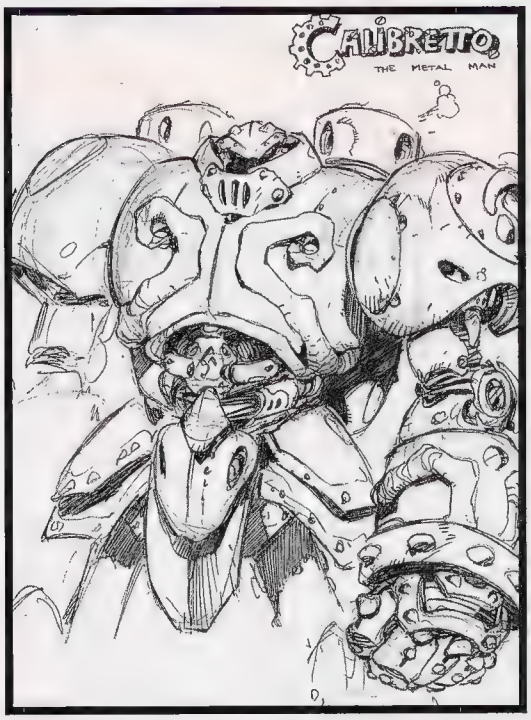
"It's going to be a challenge to make superhero readers interested, but I think our artwork will be a reason for people to pick up our books," said Ramos. "And our stories will give people fresh concepts that they haven't necessarily seen done well in comic books before."

What exactly are these fresh takes? Here's a brief look at each title:

BATTLE CHASERS

Joe Madureira is taking the manga-influenced style he brought to superheroes and using it to redefine the world of fantasy.

Madureira hopes that sword-and-sorcery comics can be brought into the limelight through *Battle Chasers*, his creation that he's co-plotting with comic newcomer Munier Sharrieff. A scripter for the series is yet to be determined.



"I'm trying to combine fantasy characters with robots," says Madureira of Calibretto and *Battle Chasers*.

Battle Chasers will take place in a *Dungeons & Dragons*-like environment that's full of technological know-how, as well as the usual medieval setting. This backdrop sets the stage for four main characters to meet. The party will include Garrison (the greatest swordsman in the world, who's vowed never to use his sword again), Gully (a nine-year-old girl who'll be the muscle of the group), an unnamed powerful space cadet of a wizard who lugs a huge spellbook on his back, and a half-machine/half-golem creature that's a combination of technology and magic. The group meets coincidentally, but stays together out of necessity. "I'm trying to combine fantasy characters with robots," said Madureira. "I'm creating a world and characters that I can do anything I want with, whether that means killing them off or making them into gods.

"It will be a very visual book, very cinematic and almost like 'Indiana Jones' in its action," continued Madureira. "It'll be filled with adventure, insane villains and dizzying action sequences."

Danger Girl is "James Bond meets the 'X-Files,'" says Campbell.

DANGER GIRL

J. Scott Campbell emphasizes action and adventure—with a heavy dose of what fans have come to know and love him for—in *Danger Girl.*

"One of the things that fans seem to enjoy about my style is my ability to draw attractive women," said Campbell. "Knowing that, and not wanting to completely ruin my career, I realized I had to incorporate that into *Danger Girl.*" Campbell will write *Danger Girl* with friend and WildStorm staffer Andy Hartnell. According to Campbell and Hartnell, *Danger Girl* will maintain the level of fun campiness that *Gen13* featured, while adding an element of intrigue.

Though Campbell is keeping story details close to his vest, he described *Danger Girl* as "James Bond meets the 'X-Files.'" The book will feature three non-superpowered women—who "will actually get hurt and bleed," according to Campbell—on extraordinary spy-type missions. "Beyond that," said Campbell, "all I'll say is that one of my goals of this series is to show that a car-chase scene in a comic book *can* actually work."

CRIMSON

Artist Humberto Ramos is adding a youthful spin to the classic vampire legend in *Crimson.*

Ramos will co-plot a vampire story set in modern-day New York City along with newcomers Oscar Pinto and Francisco Haghembeck. **Brian Augustyn** (*JLA: Year One*) scripts the series, while Ramos will handle pencils.

"We're telling *our* vampire story," said Ramos. "We're taking some common things that already exist—so to speak—in vampire myth, and combining them with our own ideas to fit the story we want to tell."

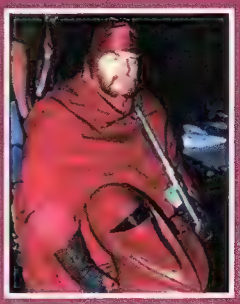
Crimson revolves around the notion that before God created humans, he created beings without souls, or vampires. One of the first vampires was Lilith, an evil woman who sided with the Devil to seek vengeance on God. When the Devil refused her at Hell's door, Lilith began plotting the destruction of Heaven and Hell by altering humans into vampires to fight in her army.

Lilith's adversary is an old vampire named Ekimus, who has the ability to see the future. Ekimus finds a human named Alex Elder with the power to defeat Lilith. But the only way Alex can stop Lilith's plan is to become a vampire himself. "Alex has to become a vampire and is angry about it," said Ramos. "The story focuses on Alex, and his feelings and relationship to Ekimus."

THE FUTURE

The three Cliffhanger launch titles will each be self-contained and won't connect to the other titles in the line. "There probably won't be any crossovers," said Campbell. "Maybe one day, we'll all swap books for a month and do each other's. But for now, we're each going to just concentrate on putting out our own work that'll be our best yet." ■ *Matthew Senreich*

Ramos' *Crimson* stars Alex Elder (above), a reluctant vampire who must halt Heaven's destruction.



Rob Liefeld

The truth behind the fall of the Empire revealed. "That's a fat guy," commented anonymous Imperial officer. "No wonder we got our asses kicked by midgets in bear suits!"

Paul Schmidt

Fans greet Rob Liefeld outside local comic con. "A full clip with every paid admission? Awesome!" chirped one young fan before emptying his gun into one-time fan favorite.

Paul Schmidt

Jim Shooter named new Starbucks spokesman. "It's just a side gig until my lawsuits with Marvel and Valiant pay out," commented once-proud comic writer before serving free samples of chocolate latte.

ahead

WALD ON 'JLA'!

ALL-IMAGE X-OVER!

NEW 'FF' ARTIST!

JURGENS JOINS 'THOR'!

Witchblade Goes Video in 'Tomb Raider II'

Witchblade, one of comic's most high-profile heroines, is gearing up for a major year-end project...but only through mail order and the World Wide Web.

Witchblade and the mega-popular video game character **Lara Croft** (*Tomb Raider*) cross paths this December in a special one-shot comic from **Top Cow Productions** and Eidos Interactive. The crossover's title has yet to be finalized, but *Witchblade* penciler **Michael Turner**, who's played—and won—*Tomb Raider*, has been tapped as both writer and artist.

"These two women," Turner said of *Witchblade*'s Sara Pezzini and *Tomb Raider* heroine Lara Croft, "even with their intense personalities, are similar. Both are very independent. But they'll have to find ways to work together if they're to survive what's in store for them in this little adventure."

The story will take place in the Top Cow Universe and have serious ramifications for each character. Lara Croft's as-yet-unexplained past will be explored. "Lara is an intriguing character," Turner said. "The book will explain just why she travels the world looking for excitement." And Turner hopes to transfer the major excitement he feels for the game to the printed page. "I was glued to my TV for weeks playing *Tomb Raider* when it came out," he said. "I played till I had finished every level and then went back and played till I found every secret. I love it!"

And don't think this is just a simple throwaway crossover. Croft will actually have an impact on future *Witchblade* issues, according to Turner.

Meant to celebrate the December release of Eidos' *Tomb Raider II*, the crossover book will cost $2.95 and won't be available in stores—it'll only be sold through mail-order or via the World Wide Web. Ads for the book will appear in Top Cow's November and December comics and in *Tomb Raider II* packaging. In addition, the book can be purchased through an American Entertainment Top Cow website at **www.topcowstore.com**. ■ *Greg Orlando*

***Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft (left) and *Witchblade*'s Sara Pezzini co-star in an exclusive comic.**

Larroca Gets 'Fantastic' News With New Assignment

It's official: **Salvador Larroca** is Fantastic.

The talented Spanish penciling newcomer, fresh off his work on Marvel Comics' *Heroes Reborn: The Return* mini-series, continues in a "Reborn" vein as he becomes the *FF*'s regular penciler with February's ***Fantastic Four*** #4. Former penciler **Alan Davis** has completed a planned three-issue stint on the relaunched book.

Larroca, who considers *FF* the "cornerstone where Marvel built its universe," is happy with the new assignment, as is *FF* writer **Scott Lobdell**. "Sal has been the Invisible Woman of comics," Lobdell said. "He's done a lot of good stuff, but people haven't noticed him yet. I think everyone will be pleasantly surprised with his work on *FF* and see him for the major talent that he is." ■ *Jim McLauchlin*

The Thing is an admitted favorite of Larroca, who joins *Fantastic Four* with #4.

BUZZ BOX

The inside scoop on the comic industry

• **A *Real* Marvel Team-Up!** Word is that Marvel Comics has an unoccupied 13th floor in its building that the company's looking to add a couple of in-house artists to. And it may even be looking to find a publishing partner. If Marvel minds its **P**'s and **Q**'s and makes it happen, it sure would be an **Event**.

• **Cap'?** Speculation has started that Marvel may roll out two separate and distinct Captain America titles, both written by fan-fave scribe Mark Waid.

• **The Old Order Changeth!** Change is in the wind for the Thunderbolts as a new member joins this fall. The strange thing? We hear it's a well-established Marvel character joining the villains-in-disguise, and rumor has it he just may be a longtime Avenger.

• **Reborn Heroes Reborn?** Hey! Looks like Bucky (that's the Rikki Barnes Bucky from "Heroes Reborn") gets to survive the events of *Heroes Reborn: The Return*. Why? Word on the street is that she just might head up a new New Warriors team in a 1999 *New Warriors* revival.

• **Dr. Gaiman?** We're talkin' slim chance here, but preliminary discussions have been happening between Marvel and *Sandman* writing legend Neil Gaiman to do a few comics. Let's just say that Gaiman has always been kinda fond of Dr. Strange...

• **Strange Tales at Marvel!** Official: Marvel Comics' new "Strange Tales" line of horror books, originally planned to be non-Code approved and "suggested for mature readers" has changed. They'll now be toned down and Code-approved. Unofficial: The writers and artists involved are up in arms, as are several Marvel staffers. While the decision, which came from new Marvel President Joseph Calamari, is none too popular, it will be followed...but very grudgingly.

Third All-Image Crossover Planned for June

The most popular heroes from some of the hottest comics unite to unravel a bizarre mystery. Is it the latest issue of *JLA* or *Avengers*? Nope. It's ***Alternate Image***, the third all-Image crossover, due out in June.

"I've always been a big fan of group books," says series writer **Jim Valentino**, who will be collaborating with a to-be-determined artist. "*Justice League of America* was my favorite book when I was a kid, and I always thought it would be cool to have an Image 'Justice League.'" Valentino sets one up in the three-issue, self-contained *Alternate Image*, with a roster that includes **Spawn**, **Witchblade**, the **Savage Dragon**, Majestic, ShadowHawk and the Maxx.

Valentino says his story is loosely based on Ursula K. LeGuin's novel, *Lathe of Heaven*. "It's about a person whose dreams affect reality," he said. In the first issue, New York's skyscrapers have been replaced with castles, and cars can fly. The first person to notice is the dream-oriented Maxx. Eventually, all the main characters unite in an effort to determine just what's gone wrong with their world.

And fans of Marvel/DC's "Amalgam" series may find the second issue of *Alternate Image* especially interesting. Tentatively titled "Everybody Smoosh Now," it will feature combined versions of Image characters, with many of the "smooshes" to be determined by readers through an upcoming *Wizard* contest.

In the final issue, the six main heroes begin phasing through time as they walk through the dreamscape. Expect to see Medieval Spawn and Medieval Witchblade, as well as an unlikely version of the Savage Dragon.

"In all, it's very, very odd," commented Valentino, "but I think it's going to be a lot of fun." ■ *Dallas Middaugh*

'LONG HALLOWEEN' TEAM MOVES TO METROPOLIS

Writer **Jeph Loeb** and artist **Tim Sale**, fresh off their year-long success of DC's 13-part *Batman: The Long Halloween*, have decided what they'll do for an encore: Superman. But don't expect any ol' Supersaga from the pair. ***Superman: For All Seasons*** will be a Superman 60th anniversary project in four prestige-format issues debuting in May or June of '98.

"DC very much wanted us to do something Batman-related again," said Loeb. "But we asked how they'd feel about our going on Superman for a year, and then back to Batman. They seemed receptive, so we made a proposal and it all came together very quickly."

For All Seasons will be a Superman "Year One" sort of treatment, with each issue focusing on a different season in the life of Clark Kent/Superman. Beginning with Clark's last days in Smallville, *Seasons* emphasizes that Superman is "man" first and "Super" second. "How does a young man from Smallville deal with the fact that he's now the most powerful man on Earth?" asked Loeb. "As the story begins, he's got the power of legends. But he's not far removed from just being his father's son. It's very much the story of the relationship between Pa Kent and Clark."

Despite their tremendous affection for Batman, Loeb said both he and Sale are anxious to spend some time in a different locale. "Tim came at this from the point of view of, 'We've just spent a year in the dark. Now let's spend a year in the light.' He's so looking forward to these double-page spreads of beautiful Norman Rockwell-type sunsets of Smallville, and contrasting that to the steel and monumental scope of Metropolis. It's going to be beautiful." ■ *Scott Brick*

'Wizard' Winner and Waid Infiltrate JLA

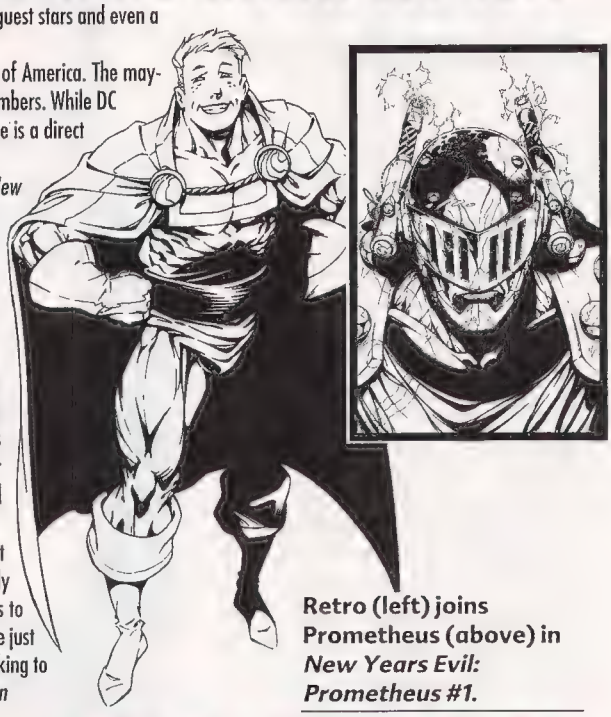
DC Comics' popular *JLA* title is bursting at the seams, with new members, guest stars and even a guest writer.

From *JLA* #16-#19, serious changes are afoot for the Justice League of America. The mayhem starts in *JLA* #16, where the League's membership balloons to 14 members. While DC is keeping the exact line-up under wraps, it's believed that a bigger league is a direct response to a big threat.

That threat is **Prometheus**, the villain introduced in December's *New Year's Evil: Prometheus* one-shot. Prometheus, who fancies himself the anti-Batman, gets his chance to take down Bats and the JLA in rather unique fashion. A hero named Retro has won a contest where the grand prize is a chance to meet the JLA at the team's Watchtower base. Prometheus tracks and kills Retro in *NYE: Prometheus* to assume Retro's identity and get into the Watchtower. And ironically, Retro himself is the subject of *another* contest.

Retro is the creation of Mike LaValle of Niles, Ill., the winner of the "JLA Tryout Contest" from the *Wizard JLA Special*. "The last thing I expected was a call from [*JLA* Editor] Dan Raspler telling me I won," said LaValle. "It's really a great thrill." LaValle and Retro were hand-picked by *JLA* writer **Grant Morrison**, who now needs a small break. Prometheus and Morrison exit after *JLA* #17, and guest-writer **Mark Waid** enters.

"It's the least I can do," said Waid, who will write *JLA* #18-#19. "Grant lent *me* his helping hand, so I'm returning the favor." Morrison is currently writing *Flash*—previously Waid's title—for one year, while Waid attends to a year-long *JLA: Year One* mini-series. But Waid won't be able to determine just what he'll do with his two issues until *he* learns the new line-up. "I'll be talking to Raspler soon," Waid said. "Hopefully he'll let me know." ■ *Jim McLauchlin*

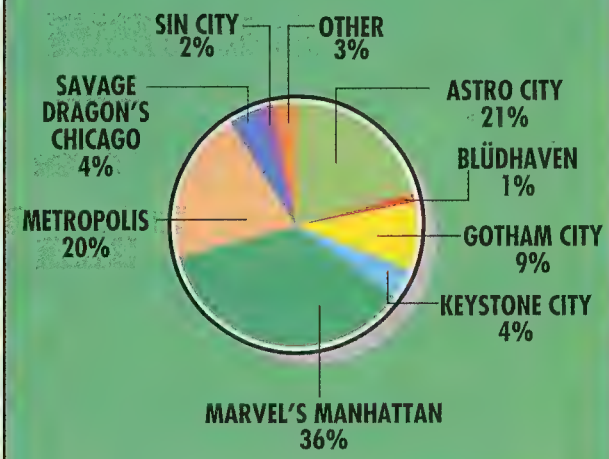


Retro (left) joins Prometheus (above) in *New Years Evil: Prometheus #1.*

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Where do you want to live when you grow up? Better yet, where would you want to live if you grew up in a comic book universe? That's the question we posed to our fans on America Online's "Wizard World" forum (Keyword: Wizard):

WHAT COMIC BOOK CITY WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE IN?



"It's all about eye candy," posted one respondent. "Marvel's Manhattan has so many superheroes, like Spidey, the FF, the Avengers and the Thunderbolts. I'd never get tired of seeing them in action."

Surprisingly, Astro City beat out the the more established Metropolis. "Astro City has a bit of the feel of Metropolis," commented one fan. "They're both full of hope, with the big difference being that Astro City has a ton of superheroes to project that hope, and Metropolis only has Superman." ■ *Conrad Bain*

Wonder Women Tackle Wonder Woman

Two of comics' most acclaimed female creators take their turn on comics' most celebrated female character when **Trina Robbins** and **Colleen Doran** collaborate on ***Wonder Woman—The Once and Future Story***.

The 48-page bookshelf-format story kicks off when Princess Diana and Julia Kapatelis investigate what seem to be the remains of an ancient Amazonian civilization in Ireland. Focusing on the issue of spousal abuse, the project tells two parallel stories, one recounting Theseus' conquest of the Amazons, and the second about a modern-day domestic problem in Ireland.

"It is a woman's issue story, but it doesn't beat you over the head with the feminism," Doran said. "I think people are tired of the shallow stories we've been getting in comics lately. This has a little meat on its bones, and it's told in a very dynamic fashion. It's a very moving story." ■ *Matthew Brady*

we LOOKED it up

ma•gog (MUH gog), noun. ancient times-present **1** prominent "anti-hero" in the DC Comics mini-series *Kingdom Come* **2** the land from which Gog, a conqueror-king, came in Biblical times **3** how someone would exclaim, "My God!" if his mouth was overstuffed with yummy-nummy chocolate chip cookies in one of those "Got milk?" TV commercials

Marvel Annuals to Work Double Time

Hoping to duplicate the enthusiasm of this year's *Daredevil/Deadpool '97*, Marvel Comics has decided to feature similar team-ups in its '98 annuals. "The challenge is to make each as good as *Daredevil/Deadpool '97* was," Marvel editor Mark Powers said.

Two annuals set to be released in early 1998, will focus on a recent X-Men nemesis and major mystery man: Bastion. February's ***Cable/Machine Man '98*** and March's ***Machine Man/Bastion '98*** will fill in all the gaps to Bastion's shady past. "You're pretty much given the whole story here," said Powers, who edits both issues. The annuals, written by Carl Bollers and Michael Higgins, also will test the waters for a possible new *Machine Man* series, Powers said.

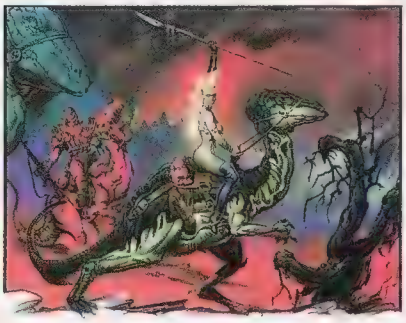
Editor Tom Brevoort, who will oversee ***Avengers/Squadron Supreme '98***, said the July release will feature a concept not seen in too many annuals these days: A story that actually continues from the monthly title. "It's not going to be superfluous. It's going to be a story that really matters," said Brevoort. The Squadron Supreme story will continue from *Avengers* #5-#6. Regular *Avengers* scribe **Kurt Busiek** will be joined by a to-be-determined artist for the annual.

Although many of the other annuals are still in the formative stages, ***Captain America/Citizen V '98*** is also a definite according to Brevoort. The book will team the Star-Spangled Avenger and his former enemy, Baron Zemo, now posing as Thunderbolts leader Citizen V. No creative team is in place yet. ■ *Scott A. Aubrey*

Creators Flock to 'Frank Frazetta Fantasy Illustrated'

"The goal is to feature the top fantasy and sci-fi writers and artists in the world," said Joe Kingsley, publisher of ***Frank Frazetta Fantasy Illustrated***. "I think we're getting there quick."

Quick indeed. *FFFI* is a quarterly, full-color, 100-page comic anthology featuring a bevy of short stories. The first issue hits in February 1998 and features a who's who of talent including Richard Corben (*Den*), **Tony Daniel** (*Spawn*), **Joe Jusko** (*Vampirella: Blood Lust*), **Joseph Michael Linsner** (*Dawn*) and **David Mack** (*Kabuki*) all providing original material. About the only person missing in the all-star line-up? Frank Frazetta, the legendary fantasy painter himself.



Joe Jusko (art shown above) is but one of many *Frazetta* contributors.

"Frank is a partner in this endeavor. We're using his name in the title and his artwork for covers," Kingsley said. "But due to his health, he won't be contributing anytime soon." Frazetta has suffered a series of small strokes, and according to Kingsley, "is doing a little sketching, but not painting anything new yet. But when he does, we'll have his first new stuff."

In the meantime, *FFFI* will just have to suffer through with the likes of Linsner and **Michael Moorcock** in the first issue. **Joe Madureira** (*Uncanny X-Men*) and **Tony Harris** (*Starman*) are lined up for May's second issue.

Why is everyone flocking to *FFFI*? According to Mack, who contributes a 15-page painted story to #1, "It's a great chance to do something with all these top guys in a really cool package. Plus, they told me I could do whatever I wanted. That's the kind of offer I like." ■ *Jim McLauchlin*

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May is Hammer Time for New Thor

Marvel Comics is hoping to capture lightning in a bottle with an all-new *Thor* series.

The Asgardian thunder god, without a title of his own since late 1996, returns to stands in May 1998 with a double-sized *Thor* #1. The ongoing series, with penciler **John Romita Jr.** already announced, finally has a writer: **Dan Jurgens.**

Although some consider Thor to be similar to the DC Kryptonian powerhouse that Jurgens writes in *Superman*, Jurgens himself does not. "On a power level, maybe they're similar. But Thor is inherently different," he said. "Superman is Clark Kent first—a very human character. Thor is very much a god. Because of that, other characters don't relate well to Thor. He's very much an outsider to humanity."

That outsider quality will be one focus of the book. "I want to balance the book with some smaller stories looking at Thor as a conflicted character trying to balance godhood with at least a sense of humanity," Jurgens said. "Of course, Thor does the huge, expansive stories very well, too."

That should play nicely to Romita. The artist is looking forward to large landscapes and impressive costumes, having worked in the more "real world" of *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* for years now. Romita says he's even "plastering the walls of my studio with Jack Kirby's original Thor work, so some of that energy can hopefully rub off on me."

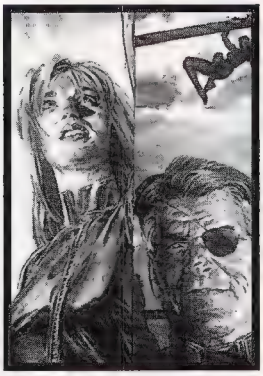
And Romita confirms he'll still be getting the best of both worlds, penciling *Thor* and *Peter Parker* concurrently. "I can do about 50 pages a month," the artist said. "And I'm going to get a good jump on *Thor*. I should have the first four issues done by the time #1 hits." ■ *Greg Matiasevich*

Jurgens joins the *Thor* crew

Marvel 'Shadows and Light' Anthology Lures Top Talent

Marvel Comics is hoping its new black-and-white is indeed read all over. And the company's enlisting the kind of creative talent that should make it a certainty. "I've already got over 20 top-notch creators lined up," said Editor Joe Andreani. "The enticement is that they can do whatever they want."

Andreani speaks of ***Shadows & Light***, a quarterly anthology launching in December with issue #1. Each *MS&L* will feature an assortment of short stories, and the first issue starts with a bang. **Ron Marz** (*Green Lantern*) and **Brian Stelfreeze** (*Batman: Shadow of the Bat*) contribute a Daredevil story, **Gene Ha** (*The Shade*) co-writes and paints a Black Widow tale with Gerry Jones, **Bernie Wrightson** (*Swamp Thing*) does a Hulk story, and comic legends **Len Wein** and **Steve Ditko** round out the issue with an Iron Man story. "We're getting this talent because we're giving as much control as possible to the creators. With black and white, the artist is in total control of the visuals. We're even giving people their choice of letterers to work with."



Shadows and Light goes quaterly in December.

MS&L debuted in 1996 as a one-shot with a simple inspiration: "It was DC's *Batman: Black and White*, but with the Marvel Universe instead," said Andreani. "Everyone wants to tinker with the Marvel Universe for at least one story and this is an opening to do it. I think a black-and-white [format] focuses on fundamentals of storytelling and gives readers the clearest view they're going to get of an artist."

Many more top-notch creators will be giving that view. **Simon Bisley**, **Moebius**, **Liam Sharp**, **Neal Adams**, Arthur Suydam and **Jim Starlin** are all slated for future issues. Even Marvel legends **Stan Lee** and **John Romita** are slated to do an ongoing newspaper strip-style Daredevil story. "I'm already booked into the year 2000 before we start," said Andreani. ■ *Jim McLauchlin*

Starman, Hellboy and Batman, Oh My!

Three heroes in a crossover? That's what readers will get in a two-issue Batman/Hellboy/Starman crossover in late spring '98. The story is written by regular *Starman* scribe **James Robinson**, with art by *Hellboy* creator **Mike Mignola**.

Batman appears in the first issue, which involves the kidnapping of Ted Knight, the father of the current Starman. Ted is in Gotham City giving a lecture when he gets nabbed by agents of a mystical cabal. Since the threat is magical in nature, Batman calls on Hellboy to help investigate.

The story moves to the Amazon jungle in the second issue, where Hellboy is joined by Jack Knight (Starman), anxious to save his father. "All questions will be answered as to who this mystical group is and what they want with Ted," Robinson said. As to the combination of characters, Robinson said, "I greatly enjoy pairing Starman and Batman, and it just seemed natural for them to meet with Hellboy. It's a project Mike and I are both really excited about." ■ *Matthew Brady*

byte this

WHAT'S UP ON WIZARD WORLD

We're cleanin' out the Wizard World Online prize closet!

We've run out of storage room, so we're giving away prizes like signed books, laser-cut statues, original sketches, trading cards and a lot more. Thing is, we need a reason to give stuff away. So, if we catch you in our Message Boards or Chat Rooms, we may have something cool for you!

Wizard World Online also congratulates Glenn Haight on his promotion to Online Assistant Editor. As WizGlen, he has spent the past year being a friend to fans and pros alike. His programming skills make him an especially valuable player to the online team!

On America Online, Keyword: Wizard.

CHAT HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE SPECIAL EVENTS ROOM

DECEMBER 9 (Tuesday)

- **DWAYNE MCDUFFIE**

Writer Dwayne McDuffie discusses "The New Direction of X-O" as he takes the reigns of *X-O Manowar*, one of Acclaim Comics' flagship titles.
Time: 8-9 p.m. (EST)

DECEMBER 16 (Tuesday)

- **MIKE WIERINGO**

The Spidey artist will discuss his previous work on *Flash* and his current work on *Sensational Spider-Man*.
Time: 9-10 p.m. (EST)

DECEMBER 20 (Saturday)

- **INDY COMICS CHAT**

Chat up all your favorite independent titles here!
Time: 9-10 p.m. (EST)

Check online for full chat schedules including club-hosted chats

■ *Buddy Scalera* (WizardTGTC@aol.com)

Are Marvel's Top Heroes Involved in a Cover-Up?

If **Dan Abnett** (*Resurrection Man*) wrote the story for Marvel's ***Conspiracy*** more than two years ago, why is the two-issue painted mini-series finally seeing print in December 1997? Could be that some of Marvel's top heroes want the story covered up.

Conspiracy follows *Daily Bugle* reporter Mark Ewing as he stumbles upon an envelope of notes, photographs and loose ends that paint a portrait of a dark conspiracy theory lurking behind the Marvel Universe. Were the powers of the Silver Age Marvel greats acquired by accident, or was there a shadowy hand guiding them all? The **Fantastic Four**, the **Hulk**, the **Avengers** and many Marvel villains play key roles in the way this alleged conspiracy fits together.

"The advantage of having it told from the point of view of a reporter," said Abnett, "is that you can do it in a kind of editorial fashion—linking stuff together, putting together pieces of a puzzle as Ewing puts together a story."

Now that the secretive work of Abnett and painter Igor Korday (*What If?* cover painter) is set to be uncovered, one question remains: Is the conspiracy just a lot of bunk? "We've been waiting for the right time to spring the series on everyone," project editor Kelly Corvese said. "It's been in a drawer for a while for a reason."

■ *Scott A. Aubrey*

Conspiracy **paints a dark portrait of the Marvel Universe.**

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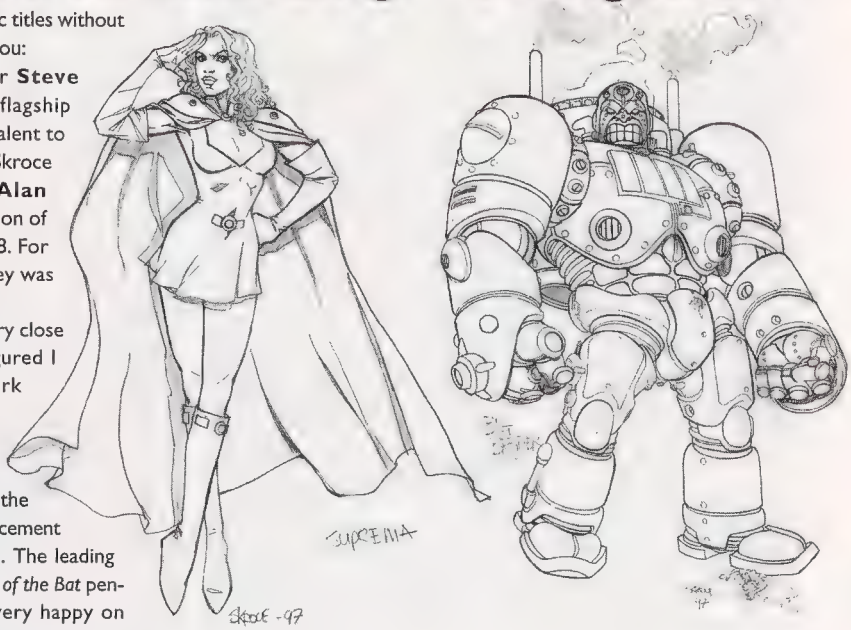
Artists Move on 'Amazing,' 'Youngblood'

Can't tell the players on major comic titles without a scorecard? Well, here's one for you:

Amazing Spider-Man penciler **Steve Skroce** has departed Marvel's flagship Spider-title to become the latest talent to jump to Awesome Entertainment. Skroce will join comic writing legend **Alan Moore** (*Supreme*) in a transformation of ***Youngblood*** slated for March 1998. For Skroce, the decision to leave Spidey was a difficult one.

"Marvel and Awesome were very close financially," said Skroce, "but I figured I might never get a chance to work with Alan Moore again. He's one of the greats."

Meanwhile, a number of fill-in artists will step in on *Amazing*, with the thought being that a permanent replacement will be found by April's issue #435. The leading candidate? Current *Batman: Shadow of the Bat* penciler **Mark Buckingham**. "I'm very happy on *Shadow* at the moment," said Buckingham. "But I've been talking to everyone at Marvel and they've been trying to entice me over. It may be I go to *Amazing* in the spring, after I've completed my contract on *Shadow*." ■ *Scott Brick*



Suprema and Big Brother are but two character designs Skroce has drawn for the new *Youngblood*.

Reclusive Steranko Profiled in Tribute Magazine

After decades in darkness, comics' most mysterious creator is finally being dragged into the light.

Artist **Jim Steranko** is the subject of a Vanguard Productions magazine entitled ***Steranko: Graphic Prince of Darkness***. Steranko, the revolutionary who brought a cinematic artistic approach to Marvel's ***Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.*** and influenced an entire generation of artists after him, has been virtually invisible on the comics landscape since the early 1970s. While his stature remains huge, his dark legend has grown. Vanguard Editor-in-Chief J. David Spurlock promises answers to the questions of where Steranko's been, in addition to tackling such rumors as whether Steranko *really* lived under an assumed name and always carried a loaded pistol for 12 years.

More importantly, the December-shipping, 40-page, $4 magazine will feature tons of unpublished Steranko art and actual preview material from possible future projects.

"It's a joint-venture platform for him to express new ideas," Spurlock said. "This will hopefully build a bridge to Steranko's future. In my mind, the world's greatest comic artist is not working in comics. I want to change that." ■ *Jim McLauchlin*

Talk About Your Longshots, Former X-Man Gets One-Shot

It's been a long time coming, but Marvel is bringing back one of its oddest mutants.

The probability-altering former X-Man Longshot returns from his native alternate-plane Mojoverse this December. *Longshot*, a 48-page one-shot written by **J.M. DeMatteis** (*Silver Surfer*) with art by **Michael Zulli** (*Sandman*), is a project that's been sitting around since 1994, when DeMatteis was writing *X-Factor*. But it was put on hold until a suitable artist could be found. Enter Zulli. "J.M. and Michael got to talking about it at a dinner party," Editor Kelly Corvese said. "The next thing we knew, Michael was in."

The story begins with Longshot's Mojoverse death and his subsequent rebirth in a backwater Kansas town where people are being controlled by something rather sinister. Longshot has to defeat the controlling entity. Despite the serious tone of the enemy, DeMatteis stresses that the story is "really kind of playfully innocent. It's like a fairy tale, but a fairy tale for grown-ups. And Michael's art really captures that mood." ■ *Matthew Brady*

Longshot gets "Vertigo" with art by former *Sandman* artist Zulli.

Whut The--?!

Wizard answers the Burning question

Confused by the ending of DC's ***Batman: The Long Halloween***? You aren't alone. The climactic 13th issue from writer **Jeph Loeb** and artist **Tim Sale** finished the year-long murder mystery, but left many scratching their heads.

After a hell of a lot of sleuthing (and tequila shots), *Wizard* answers this burning question:

Q: Who was Holiday?
A: There were two, as D.A. Harvey Dent (Two-Face) said in issue #13.

• Holiday #1—Gilda, Dent's wife, was the first Holiday—just like she admitted in the last four pages. Her hubby promised they'd spend more time together when he had less work, so Gilda, on her own, spent three holidays murdering members of mob boss Carmine "The Roman" Falcone's gang to help Harvey out.

Her last murder was on Christmas and she gave up the role for two reasons: 1) Gilda had gotten what she really wanted: a house to have a family in (and she and Harvey were going to try to have children again). 2) As of New Year's Eve, she mistakenly thought Harvey took up the reins of Holiday with news of Holiday's killing of the Roman's son, Alberto Falcone. But she was wrong…

• Holiday #2—Alberto faked his own death, becoming the new Holiday.

This plot was hatched by Alberto and his father, who both decided to use the Holiday identity to whack the men of rival "Boss" Maroni; note the shift in victims from New Year's Eve forward.

Doesn't make sense? Think about it: Alberto was the Roman's secret weapon from times *before* the series even began. In public, the Roman chided his son when Alberto asked to help him in his "business." Yet in his thoughts, the Roman would think more than once that Alberto is "the only one I can trust." For a son who was never allowed to help, wasn't it strange that Alberto was always in those business meetings?

As for why the Riddler lived on April Fool's Day (issue #7), the Roman hired him to "solve" the Holiday case and publicize the fact that the Roman was "looking" for Holiday. (Alberto, as Holiday, "failed" to kill Riddler in the alley—who else but a family member would even know about such an alley?)

But after Alberto was caught in issue #13, he defied his father and took credit for *all* the murders. Alberto was resentful of two things: 1) His father always put business before Alberto while growing up, and 2) Now that Alberto was finally involved in family business, he was always a "behind-the-scenes" guy when he was actually the true brains behind his father's empire. By going public, he had become a bigger criminal than the Roman.

But this might all be discussed in the proposed sequel to *Long Halloween*. Until then, happy holidays. ■ *The* Wizard *Staff*

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company updates

ACCLAIM COMICS
In January, the teen team ***Harbinger*** returns with a new creative team and a 48-page one shot....**Bart Sears** returns to pencil an issue of *X-O Manowar* guest-starring Quantum, of *Quantum and Woody*.

ARCHIE COMICS
Learn the true reason why **Knuckles** gave up his role as Guardian of the Floating Island in January's *Knuckles #11*.

AVATAR PRESS
Trent Kaniuga's ***Creed*** relocates as Avatar publishes #1 of the monthly two-issue mini-series *Creed: Use Your Delusion* in January....Look for a crossover between Avatar's demon hunter Pandora and London Night Studios' demon-driven **Razor** in January's *Pandora/Razor: Devil Inside #1*.

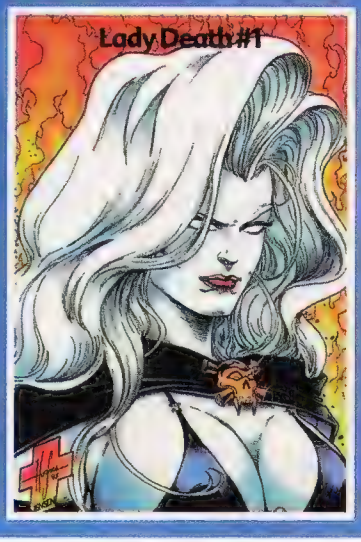
AWESOME ENTERTAINMENT
Alan Moore writes a 40-page stand-alone *Judgment Day: Aftermath* in January, capping off the Awesome crossover series. Comic legend **Gil Kane** supplies the art....Originally planned as a mini-series, January's *The Coven #5* marks the series' transition to an ongoing. The former *Cable* team of Jeph Loeb and **Ian Churchill** will cointinue to write and draw the book.

BYRON PREISS MULTIMEDIA
Preiss' 1998 Marvel Comics novel line is highlighted by *X-Men & Spider-Man: Time's Arrow*. The trilogy of books is written by *Amazing Spider-Man* scribe **Tom DeFalco**.

CALIBER PRESS
In January, Caliber releases **Mark Budger**'s *Comics and Computers*, providing step-by-step instructions for creating comics on your computer. The 48-page special is $3.95.

CARTOON BOOKS
Starting in ***Bone*** #31, Stan Sakai (*Usagi Yojimbo*) and Tom Sniegoski (*Vampirella*) create a five-part backup story that will features the stupid, stupid rat creatures and an all-new character named "Riblet."

CHAOS! COMICS
You wanted her monthly? You got her! ***Lady***

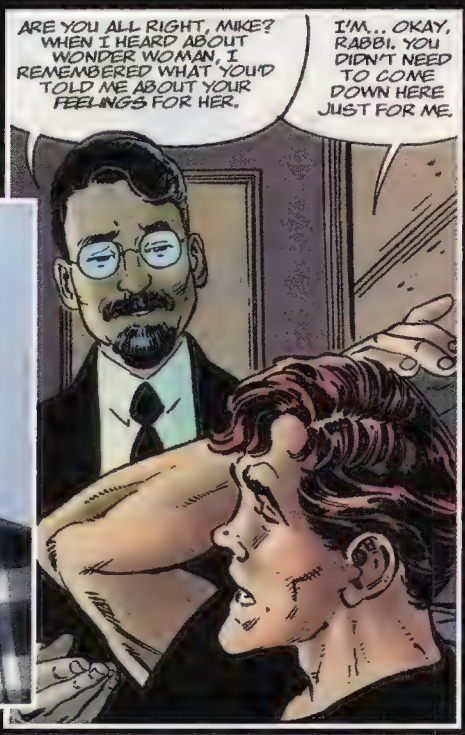


DOUBLE TAKES

Oy! When DC Comics' Wonder Woman was on her deathbed in *Wonder Woman #125*, her kinda-boyfriend Mike Schorr was in need of a little spiritual counsel. Enter the only man who could save the day: Rabbi Wilkofsky!

Yep, Rabbi Wilkofsky was based on *Wizard*'s very own Wonder Woman-adoring Copy Editor Marc Wilkofsky. *Wonder Woman* writer/artist John Byrne said he put the Marc-come-Rabbi in there simply because he's "the friend of a friend and there's really nothing more subversive to it than that." That friend in question is Ruth Morrison, who's gotten a Wonder Woman credit or two to *her* credit, having written a back-up story in *WW#120* and a Wonder Woman tale for an upcoming *Secret Files*. Rabbi Wilko is on for a little more than one page before he heads off into the comic sunset. But will he return? "I have no plans," said Byrne. "But who knows? He wasn't killed off."

Paul Schiraldi



Death goes monthly in January with a new #1 issue and the regular creative team of Brian Pulido and Steven Hughes.

CLAYPOOL COMICS

December's *Soul Searchers & Company #27* features a cover by Amanda Conner (*Vampirella*), and the regular creative team **Peter David** (*Incredible Hulk*) and Dave Cockrum (*X-Men*).

CRUSADE ENTERTAINMENT

January's *Shi: Heaven and Earth #4* closes the **Billy Tucci**-written mini-series with a battle between Shi and her masters, the Kyoto *sohei*, as the origin of her warrior society is revealed.

Shi: Heaven and Earth #4

DARK HORSE COMICS

Whoo-hoo! Groo is back! January sees the first ish of a four-part *Groo* series by **Sergio Aragonés** and Mark Evanier.

FIREMAN PRESS

December's *Scud: The Disposable Assassin #19* features Scud and Sussudio bouncing around in the plot of a teenage slasher film filled with lots of dying, odd weapon usage and random women in showers.

GOBLIN STUDIOS

Joe Psycho & Moo Frog jump into color in January's 32-page *Joe Psycho & Moo Frog Color Special*, sporting a new **Ethan Van Sciver** (*Cyberfrog*) story.

IMAGE COMICS

• HIGHBROW ENTERTAINMENT

January's *Savage Dragon* marks the 45th consecutive issue written, pencilled and inked by **Erik Larsen**. Larsen's own version of the mythical Thor and Hercules mix it up in this issue.

• HOMAGE COMICS

The *Wizard*-published *Astro City #1/2* will be reprinted this January by Homage with a cover price of $2.50. Besides an all-new **Alex Ross** cover, check out the cool prose back-up story by **Kurt Busiek** and **Brent Anderson**. **Scott McCloud's** long-awaited *The New Adventures of Abraham Lincoln* is finally hitting stores in February. This 130-page graphic novel was produced completely on computer. January's *Darkchylde Swimsuit Illustrated #1* ($2.50) contains your favorite shape-changing teenager as drawn by tons of artists including Randy Queen and **Jim Lee**.

• IMAGE CENTRAL

Kabuki: Dreams collects two painted Kabuki stories from **David Mack** in one volume for $4.95 in January. *Sharky* is a new ongoing about a 14 year old suddenly granted godlike powers. Issue #1 hits in January with a guest appearance from Dark Horse's **The Mask**.

• TOP COW PRODUCTIONS

American Entertainment's **Topcowstore.com** is an officially licensed online Top Cow "store" featuring, among other things, online-order exclusive Top Cow comic books.

• WILDSTORM PRODUCTIONS

January's *Divine Right: The Collected Edition #1* ($5.95) collects issues #1-#2 of **Jim Lee**'s new series with an all-new cover by Lee and new "R rated" dialogue and possibly some nudity.

LONDON NIGHT STUDIOS

Razor undergoes a major revamp in early 1998 as her creator, **Everette Hartsoe**, takes back the writing and drawing reins of her series. Its title will change from *Razor Uncut* to *Razor Saga* with #45.

MARVEL COMICS

December's *Fantastic Four #2* ships with an alternate cover by former *Uncanny X-Men* penciler **Joe Madureira**....And Madureira's *Uncanny* partner **Scott Lobdell** writes a Black Widow story in *Journey into Mystery #517*.

MURIM STUDIOS

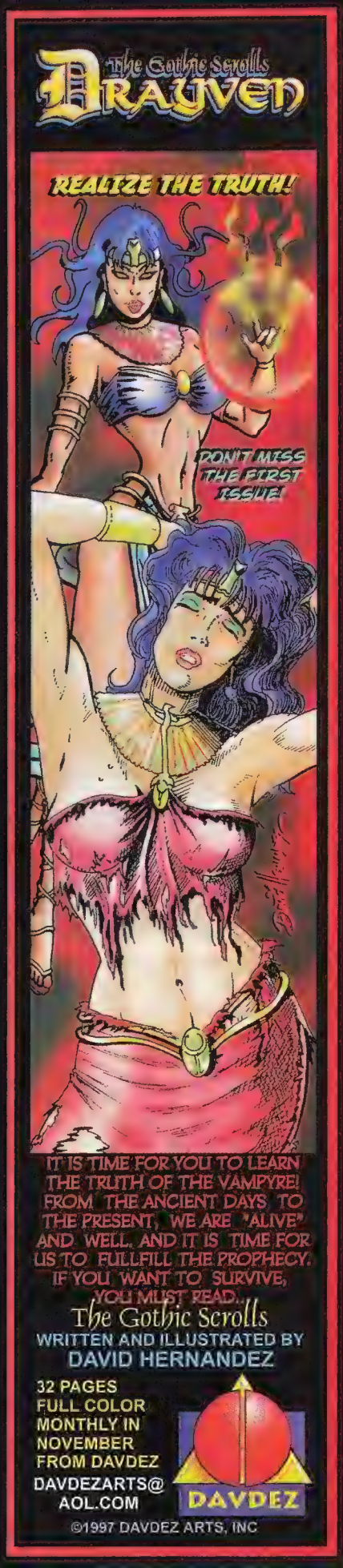
Coming in December, *Tzu: Spirit of Death #2* has **Tzu** searching for treasure on an ancient battleground.

SIRIUS ENTERTAINMENT

The first-ever map of Amrahly'nn, the world of Poison Elves, appears in the *Poison Elves Volume 4* paperback, out in January. It's 48 pages of **Drew Hayes** mayhem for only $4.95.

VIZ COMICS

Eat-Man, who can eat guns and then shoot bullets from his hand, ends his first mini-series with January's *Eat-Man #6*. But fear not—Viz promises Eat-Man will return in February with a new mini-series.



NEWS IN REVIEW: 1997

Rob Liefeld starts on "Heroes Reborn"...and gets fired in mid-run? DC Comics changes the look of the most recognized superhero on the planet? Comics' juggernaut publisher goes bankrupt?

Last December, no one could've foreseen any of these events as actually happening. Yeah, they would have looked like great *What If?* stories, but that's about it. But ya know what? They all happened. It's truly been a wonderfully bizarre year in comic-related news. Here are the last 12 months' major highlights:

Look at *That* Up in the Sky!

In 1992, they killed him. In 1996, they married him. In 1997, **Superman** got energized with a shocking new change: all-new powers and all-new duds.

The most iconic superhero ever exchanged his well-known garb for a blue-and-white "energy containment suit" in February that captured the world's attention. Superman's radical alteration garnered media coverage from CNN, "Entertainment Tonight" and a bevy of local and network news shows. So what was the deal?

Supes' costume change was the result of DC Comics' 1996 *Final Night* crossover, which caused Superman to lose his powers after the sun seemingly went out. When the sun emerged again, his powers returned, but Superman learned they weren't the same powers he had before.

His new energy-based powers kicked into effect in *Adventures of Superman* #545. His new powers were out of control, however, and Superman's desperate need to contain his powers created the necessity for the new costume designed by S.T.A.R. Labs, with an "assist" from Supes' arch-nemesis Lex Luthor. The costume debuted in *Superman* #123.

The CNNs of the world loved the story, but fan reaction was mixed. Comic store sales of Superman titles slumped slightly, while newsstand sales increased. And for 1998, a new horizon looms: Superman's 60th birthday, leading many to speculate that traditional Supes will return just in time to blow out the candles on his cake in April. "Everything comes to a logical conclusion," said *Adventures of Superman* writer Karl Kesel. "Whether that means the return of his original costume...we'll see."

Heroes Re-Re-Reborn

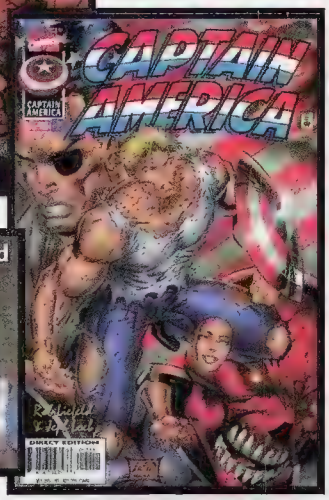
First, Marvel Comics hired **Rob Liefeld** as part of "Heroes Reborn." Soon after, they fired him.

For those of you who don't remember, "Heroes Reborn" was the controversial year-long Marvel reboot plan that gave former Marvel artists **Jim Lee** and Rob Liefeld creative control of four Marvel titles—*Avengers*, *Captain America*, *Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man*.

However, six months after "Heroes Reborn" began and amid rampant rumors of missed deadlines, Marvel fired Liefeld. Despite sales that nearly tripled on the Liefeld-run *Avengers* and *Cap* books, Marvel cited a minimum-sales clause in its contract with Liefeld to terminate the deal. Although Lee's *Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man* titles were selling only slightly more than Liefeld's, Lee met the minimum sales clause and Marvel looked to Lee to finish Liefeld's run. Lee accepted, taking over with *Captain America* #7 and *Avengers* #8.

As "Heroes Reborn" neared its 12th and final issue, Marvel still wasn't ready to reintegrate its titles back into the Marvel Universe. So Marvel extended Lee's deal by one month to include a 13th issue for all "Reborn" books. The extension demonstrated a blossoming relationship between Marvel and Lee, and talk of a second "Heroes Reborn" deal emerged. There have been rumors about Marvel giving Jim Lee creative

Photos: Paul Schiraldi



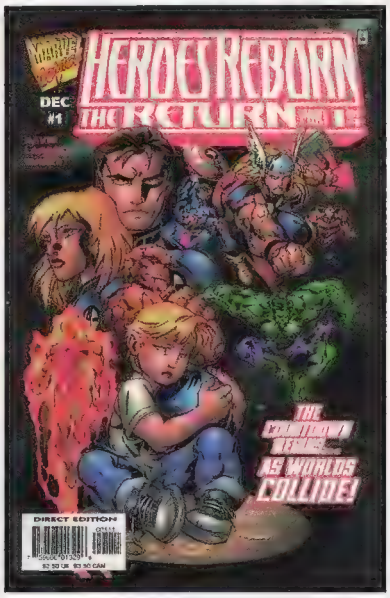
control of *Defenders*, *Dr. Strange*, *Nick Fury* and possibly even other books in a "Heroes Reborn"-like deal, but it's still all speculation. "It's been discussed," said Lee, president of WildStorm Productions. "But right now, I'm focusing on my own company, so the likelihood of doing other Marvel books is slim. But you never know."

Heroes–Finally–Return

It was perhaps the most anticipated storyline in the history of comics. "Heroes Reborn"—with stories that took place in a separate "pocket universe"—had ended, and the Marvel heroes were returning to the one true Marvel Universe after a year-long hiatus.

Ever since the Avengers and Fantastic Four were whisked away to the pocket universe after the defeat of the mutant menace Onslaught, fans have been waiting for their inevitable return. By October 1997, the time for "Heroes Return" had come.

Fans marveled at the possibilities of the logistics of how the "Reborn" characters might return. And creators lined up to take the reins on the titles when they "Returned." Writer **Peter David** and penciler **Salvador Larroca** kick-started the story in a four-issue weekly *Heroes Reborn: The Return* mini-series that led directly into relaunched books with new #1 issues.



November saw the releases of *Fantastic Four* #1 by **Scott Lobdell** and **Alan Davis**, and *Captain America* #1 by **Mark Waid** and **Ron Garney**. That was followed up in December with Avengers #1 by **Kurt Busiek** and **George Pérez**, and Busiek and Sean Chen on *Iron Man* #1.

Now that the heroes have returned, they must live up to the incredible hype that accompanied the return. But with fan-favorite creative talent, a high level of fan excitement and promising sales on early issues, things look bright for Marvel's Returned heroes.

"X" Marks the Overhaul

As usual, it was a year of change for the **X-Men**. But this time, change started with characters and spilled over to creators.

The ride began as "Operation: Zero Tolerance" marked 1997's summer crossover. A new villain named Bastion came knocking, with ideas of eliminating all mutants. Quite naturally, he was drawn into conflict with the X-Men. New members joined, as Maggot (who sics giant matter-devouring slugs on people) and Cecilia Reyes (a doctor who projects a force field) came on board. But no one foresaw the ending of "Zero Tolerance"—or the repercussions.

The storyline ended as Bastion surrendered to S.H.I.E.L.D. agents in *X-Men* #69. The ending was largely panned by fans as anti-climactic, but along the way, Bastion picked up an incredible following. He will be the focus of two one-shot comics from Marvel in 1998.

"Zero Tolerance" also proved to be the swan song for **Scott Lobdell**, writer of both *X-Men* and *Uncanny X-Men* for the previous seven years. As Lobdell moved to Marvel's relaunched *Fantastic Four*, Marvel turned *X-Men* over to relative newcomer **Joe Kelly** and *Uncanny* to Vertigo veteran **Steven T. Seagle**. At the same time, popular penciler **Joe Madureira** left *Uncanny* to start a creator-owned project, and Marvel turned to **Chris Bachalo** to handle art chores.

The X-books enter 1998 with new members, a new nemesis, new creators, and, says Seagle, a new direction. "We're hoping to bring a sense of clarity," he said. "Clear stories and clear characters with clear motivations. The books have some of the strongest art teams ever. If Joe and I deliver stories of equal caliber, we'll soar."

Marvel for Sale?

The Heroes were Reborn. They Returned. The X-Men got a complete oil change and tune-up. But the greatest Marvel soap opera of the year was one of real life. And for once, the fate of the Marvel Universe wasn't in the hands of Reed Richards or Professor X, but in the hands of bankruptcy court.

Marvel spent the whole of 1997 in Chapter 11 (reorganization) bankruptcy. And the big news? On the printed page, *it just didn't matter!* Surprisingly, things went as planned in an editorial sense for Marvel. In fact, things went even *better* than expected. "Heroes Reborn" paid Lee and Liefeld money the likes of which comic freelancers have never seen before. "Return" shelled out big bucks for big-name talent. And everyone got paid. Marvel kept comic publishing going, even though the company was in dire financial straits.

On September 16, 1997, things got better. Marvel and its lenders reached a tentative agreement to settle Marvel's bankruptcy debts. Prior to the arrangement, things were touch and go. The company was in danger of having to go to Chapter 7 (liquidation) bankruptcy, in which Marvel would have to sell its assets to pay creditors. What would that have meant? The Hulk might have gone up for sale to the highest bidder. The Marvel Universe might have been broken up.

Marvel isn't completely out of the woods yet, but it is on more stable footing than it's been in a year, and the future looks good. "Marvel Comics' publishing schedule has not been affected during bankruptcy," said Publisher Shirrel Rhoades, "and we're now confident that we'll be able to steer out of the bankruptcy phase with everything continuing as planned."

And the year to come? We can reasonably expect the return of the traditional Superman. We can reasonably expect "Heroes Return" to kick ass. Or can we? If 1997 is any indication, the only thing we can reasonably expect is the unexpected. ■ *Jim McLauchlin and Matthew Senreich*

FAMILY REUNION

By Scott Brick

Realizing it can't live on X-Men alone, Marvel shifts focus back to its core superheroes in one coherent universe

Marvel Editor-in-Chief Bob Harras thought about it long and hard and came to a decision: Marvel Comics cannot live on X-Men alone. The division of the Marvel Universe into separate and unequal parts had to end—in short, Marvel must return to the notion of One Cohesive Universe.

It is an idea whose time had come. For over a decade, Marvel's success was almost completely dependent on the X-Men. As the popularity of Marvel's mutants grew, so did the number of titles they inhabited and the money they raked in. It started in the '80s with *New Mutants*, *Excalibur* and *X-Factor*. By 1995, there were more than a half-dozen mutant books and something had to give.

It did. "I think there's been a lot of years of Marvel doing lots and lots of new and interesting things with the X-Men characters," says *Heroes for Hire* editor Mark Bernardo. "But this led to corners of the

Marvel Universe being untouched, a bunch of characters that always had potential languishing."

Despite an expansive explosion in one corner of the universe, Marvel's overall universe was floundering. The company's top talent naturally gravitated toward the high-profile X-books. Comics that had been Marvel's bread and butter, titles like *Fantastic Four* and *Avengers*, looked to be semi-neglected children, living off hand-me-downs.

Things got worse before someone thought to make them better. As part of 1995's "Marvelution," Marvel split its universe into five separate kingdoms (Spider-Man books, X-titles, Marvel Universe heroes, Marvel's horror-related comics and licensed offerings), each with its own editor-in-chief and distinct cover icons. Where there was once one guiding force, now there were five. Insiders at Marvel worried that this policy would fractionalize the Marvel Universe. They were right, and continuity between the titles suffered.

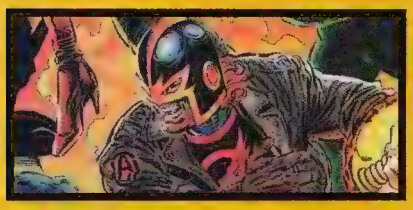
"I think the mistake was not in concentrating on one to the detriment of another," maintains *Iron Man* and *Avengers* writer Kurt Busiek, "but in dividing them up, deciding that an X-Universe villain is only going to appear in the X-Universe, a Spider-Man villain is only going to appear in the Spider-Man Universe. I think that ended up making the Marvel Universe look like five different universes, one of which was successful, another of which was pretty successful, the others of which were not successful. There's just no upside to doing that."

"MARVELUTION" DISSOLVED IN THE FALL OF 1995, and Harras was promoted to Marvel's sole editor-in-chief. But though the Marvel Universe was united under one leader, it was still divided in many ways. The emphasis rested squarely on the X-Men and their accompanying titles, instead of on the Marvel Universe as a whole. When characters met between the books, they often came in the form of sprawling, impersonal crossovers, and not the interesting one-on-one meetings between heroes that once stood as the hallmark of a Marvel comic. Think about it: the last big Marvel crossover that *didn't* revolve around mutants was 1993's *The Infinity Crusade*.

"I always felt the X-Men were just one part of the Marvel Universe," Harras says.

What Went Wrong?

Marvel's splitting into five separate lines back in 1995 wasn't the *only* thing that turned fans off to its core heroes. Somewhere along the way, Marvel's main headliners lost their basics. Here's a quick rundown of what Marvel's core heroes are supposed to be like, as well as where they went wrong. ■ *The* Wizard *Staff*

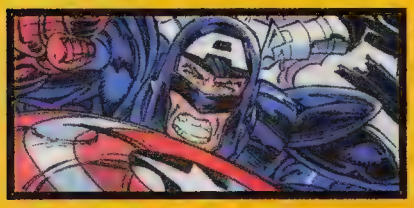


Avengers

THEIR DEAL: As Earth's Mightiest Heroes, the Avengers band together to protect the world from those who seek to conquer it.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Avengers #272-#277*. With Hercules near death, the Avengers struggle in a losing battle before rallying to beat the most powerful Masters of Evil yet.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: With no Cap, Thor or Iron Man around, the lackluster Avengers team around *Avengers #376* was comprised of second-raters like Black Knight (above) and Sersi. Earth's Crummiest Heroes was more like it.

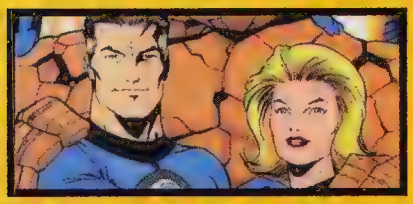


Captain America

HIS DEAL: Injected with the military's experimental "Super-Soldier" serum, wiry Steve Rogers was transformed into the perfect physical human specimen. He has since devoted his life to preserving the American Dream as the patriotic Captain America.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Infinity Gauntlet #4*. As the last hero alive, Cap faces off against the omnipotent Thanos despite absolutely impossible odds.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: *Captain America #425*. Cap discovered the Super-Soldier serum in his blood was killing him and so relied upon high-tech armor to continue the good fight (shown above). The more energy he'd expend, however, the closer he'd get to death. He was uncharacteristically whiny and very un-Caplike throughout the ordeal. While an intriguing concept, the execution dragged on for about a year, with many readers tiring of it quickly.



Fantastic Four

THEIR DEAL: Empowered by cosmic rays, Reed Richards, his wife Sue, her brother Johnny Storm and

"They're a great part of the Marvel Universe, but we should never forget that there are other great characters out there. One of the things I want to do, and I think we're doing it, is remind fans and ourselves that there are other concepts and other characters out there as exciting as the X-Men."

With Harras' promotion, the stage was set for the refocusing of the Marvel Universe. Getting there, however, took some doing.

When core characters such as the Fantastic Four, Captain America and the Avengers all departed Marvel's universe at the end of 1996's epic story "Onslaught," Harras realized he had the tools needed to unify his company and make it the cohesive universe it had once been.

First came "Heroes Reborn," which was, in some ways, a step back. "Reborn," a year-long storyline under the auspices of all-new creative teams, sent the Avengers and Fantastic Four to an alternate universe—one *without* mutants. The heroes' return, though, was inevitable and Harras decided their arrival would provide the spark needed to unify the Marvel Universe again.

Striking while the iron was white-hot, Harras sought out some of the top names in the industry to relaunch the returning heroes in their new/old books. Noted artist George Pérez is back penciling *The Avengers*. Hugely popular Busiek is writing both *The Avengers* and *Iron Man*. Scott Lobdell, fresh from a five-year stint on the X-Men, is helming the *Fantastic Four*. Veteran artist Alan Davis (*Excalibur*) is penciling *FF* for its first three issues and then handing the chores off to talented newcomer Salvador Larroca (*Heroes Reborn: The Return*). Dan Jurgens, the man who killed Superman, will team with artist John Romita Jr. (*Peter Parker: Spider-Man*) to re-establish *Thor* as a marketable commodity. To complete this list, Harras pulled off the public relations coup of the decade, and brought back Mark Waid and Ron Garney to work on *Captain America*—a book they'd rejuvenated before "Heroes Reborn" sent Cap into an alternate universe. By strengthening its core stable of titles with such prestigious talent, Marvel has shown its semi-neglected children some much needed attention and made it clear that it'll no longer ignore one portion of its universe in favor of another.

These creators will be a diving board from which this new policy springs. While Harras' plan is ongoing and has no official start date, the November and December launches of the core Marvel heroes in *Avengers, Captain America, Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man* should set the stage for Marvel's unified universe.

TOP TALENT WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. In order to make a cohesive universe again, Harras decided it was time for Marvel's creators to return to the basics. "For me," says Pérez, "the one thing that set Marvel apart was the attention paid to the characterization by Stan Lee, I think that's what made the characters more three-dimensional. Add to that the very grand opera-style heroics which Jack Kirby helped establish at Marvel in the 1960s, having the grand epic with a feeling of humanity, where story and artwork were equally important."

"All you have to do is read a couple of Marvel books from the '60s and early '70s, and it's right there in front of you," says Romita Jr. "It's just deliberate storytelling. Come up with a really good idea and you don't have to have beards on superheroes and huge costume changes anymore, just tell a good story."

Obviously, Lee and Kirby's glory days are long gone. However, according to Bernardo, one basic quality the duo

Paul Schiraldi

"One of the things I want to do is remind fans and ourselves that there are other concepts and other characters out there as exciting as the X-Men."

—Bob Harras

Photo courtesy of John Romita Jr.

"Come up with a really good idea and you don't have to have beards on superheroes and huge costume changes anymore, just tell a good story."
—John Romita Jr.

helped to establish can be recaptured, and it's deliciously simple: "That feeling from Stan Lee and Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby's day," says Bernardo, "where you really had a sense that everything was existing in the same universe and that everything that happened in every book was important, to some extent, to the overall picture."

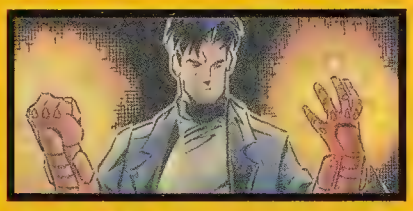
Any walls that were brought up between Marvel's titles are set to crumble. From now on, the X-Men will have far more interaction with the rest of Marvel's characters, at least according to X-editor Mark Powers. "The evidence will be visible almost immediately: The X-Men's Beast will be appearing in the Avengers' first few issues. In *X-Men* #71, the X-Men will be reacting to the news of the heroes being back. The Fantastic Four and Silver Surfer will be meeting up in *Fantastic Four* #4, and crossing over with *Silver Surfer* #138. Even in *Cable*, we're hoping to do something where he teams up with the Black Panther."

The Spider-Man titles, which were isolated to a lesser extent than the X-Men, will also be seeing far more interaction with Marvel's assorted

Reed's best friend Ben Grimm, join forces as the Marvel Universe's troubleshooting adventurers, the Fantastic Four.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Fantastic Four* #242-#244. The FF and Avengers must stop a desperate and dying Galactus from eating Earth.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: When Alicia Masters was revealed to be a shape-shifting skrull in *Fantastic Four* #357. This was a bad omen of three other eventual turn-offs: Invisible Woman in a waaay-outta-character slinky costume (with a waaay-outta-character attitude, to boot); the killing of Mr. Fantastic by Dr. Doom in a simple blast (Doom, a master schemer, would use a grandiose Machiavellian plot to enact final revenge against Richards, not the blatant desperation attempt the used); and four-year-old Franklin Richards turning into a teenager (this not only fractured the family feel of the book, but also came across as pure shock schlock).



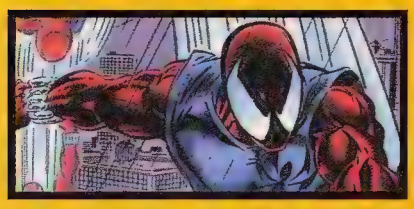
Iron Man

HIS DEAL: Billionaire industrialist and inventor Tony Stark dons advanced high-tech armor to become Iron Man.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Iron Man* #149-#150. When Geniuses Collide! Iron Man faces off against Dr. Doom, only to get thrust into the distant past—namely, back

to King Arthur's day. They then share their technical know-how to return to the present.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: *Avengers: The Crossing #1*. The story essentially not only made Tony Stark into a villain, but revealed he's *always* been a villain under Kang's control. And then he dies, only to be replaced by an alternate world's teenage version of himself. Uh-huh.



Spider-Man

HIS DEAL: Bitten by a radioactive spider, Peter Parker gained super-strength, the ability to stick to most surfaces and a special "sense" warning him of danger. He uses those powers to fight crime as Spider-Man.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Amazing Spider-Man #229-#230*. In order to halt the Juggernaut from killing the elderly Madame Web, Spidey puts his life on the line and takes a serious beating in the process.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: While the seeds of his downfall began with his marriage and the seeming return of his long-dead parents, it was *Web of Spider-Man #117* that was the final nail in the coffin. This started the infamous "Clone Saga," which insulted fans by saying the Spidey they've been collecting since 1975 wasn't the real Spidey, but actually a clone. Although even *that* fact eventually proved to be false, the damage left a serious wound that still hasn't healed.

Thor

HIS DEAL: As the Norse God of Thunder, Thor wields the enchanted hammer Mjolnir, which can unleash unearthly storms at Thor's whim and transport him anywhere he wishes.

DEFINING MOMENT: *Thor #337-#340*. Thor meets Beta Ray Bill, who's trying to save his alien race from demons. The two find themselves in mortal combat, with Beta Ray Bill ending up with Mjolnir and Thor facing execution.

WHERE IT WENT ASTRAY: When regular guy Eric Masterson took over Thor's mind and transformed into the Thunder God in *Thor #451* (above). Thor's coolness relies on a balance between great superhero stuff and mythical Asgardian fantasy; Masterson's "everyguy" personality might've been a different twist for Thor, but it killed the grandeur of what made the Thunder God special.

characters. Spidey editor Ralph Macchio maintains that many of the returning heroes will be guest-starring with Spider-Man in the near future. "I think the Marvel Universe was founded on the idea of a shared reality," he says, "and it's probably better that the books be that way."

To help fix this universe in place, Harras is planning to make interaction between the Marvel characters an everyday occurrence. Imagine the Marvel Universe as a big pond. Drop a stone in, and there's going to be ripples felt throughout. And it's all part of Harras' plan.

"What we're trying to do," maintains Harras, "and it's going to take time, is the little things. For instance, if something happens in an issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*, then in an issue of *Alpha Flight* someone's reading the *Daily Bugle*. Why they'd be reading it in Canada I don't know, but it would be nice to see a headline referring to something that happened in *Amazing Spider-Man* that month. Little things like that. It's a bigger universe now, and it's tougher to coordinate.

"It's now part of our job to make sure these little things happen. The little things are as important, to my mind, as these big crossovers. They're little things that remind the readers that people are taking care, and taking care sometimes means just stopping for a few minutes and going, 'Okay, what's going down in *Sensational Spider-Man* this month? Let's have Foggy refer to it in *Daredevil* because he's dating Liz Allen.' We won't do it all the time, and we'll mess it up from time to time, but that is the game plan."

IN THIS BRAVE NEW WORLD OF MARVEL'S NEW EXISTENCE, the focus won't be on huge universe-swallowing crossovers (although they're probably inevitable down the line), but rather, interactions between characters. "When Bob Harras talks about getting back to basics," says Busiek, "I think he's talking about letting the connections be organic, instead of doing big-ass crossovers where everybody shows up and acts like a robot. Why not just explore connections where they happen without a whole lot of big careful editorial coordination that restricts writers?

"Why not just let writers and artists see connections and make use of them on a guest-star basis? If I do an issue of *Avengers* that opens with a pickup basketball game between the Black Knight and some of the Avengers, it doesn't need to be a situation where that gets followed up in that month's issue of *Heroes for Hire*; it can just be there and be fun for what it is."

Time will tell if Marvel can pull off its plan to bring back a unified universe. One thing that's not in dispute, however, is that this is a wake-up call for Marvel. The company's learned that long-lasting success means focusing itself equally between all its creations. By doing so, it has the potential to not only reunite the Marvel Universe, but to excite fans who'd previously written off classic characters like Thor, Captain America and the Fantastic Four in favor of whatever new mutant book was hot that month. Marvel's new revamped universe even has the potential to revitalize the industry.

"I hope it kick-starts the characters," Romita Jr. says. "That the characters kick-start the company, that they kick-start the Universe, and that it kick-starts the industry again. I think that has to happen—somebody just has to find that pedal."

Paul Schiraldi

"When Bob Harras talks about getting back to basics, I think he's talking about letting the connections be organic, instead of doing big-ass crossovers where everybody shows up and acts like a robot."
—Kurt Busiek

Scott Brick lives in California, loves on the astral plane and disobeys laws that only he can hear.

Cover reproduction of
Tales of the Age of Apocalypse: Sinister Bloodline.
Pencil and ink art by Steve Epting.
Inspired by 48-page one-shot written by John Francis Moore.
(December 10, 1997)

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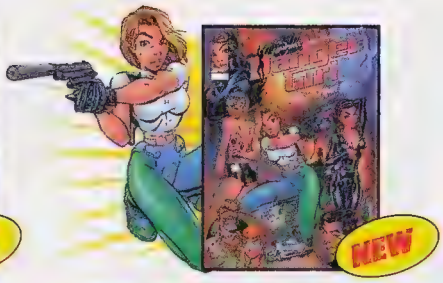

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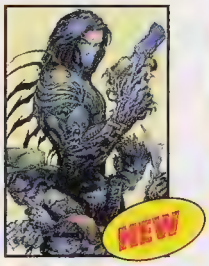

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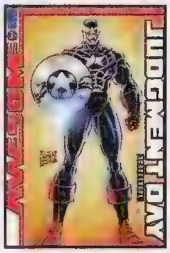

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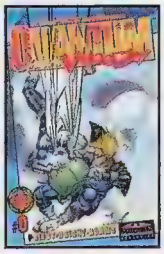

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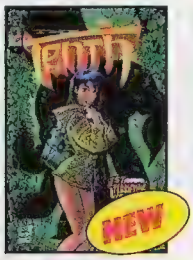

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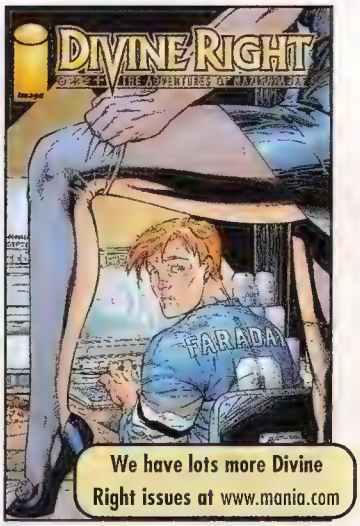

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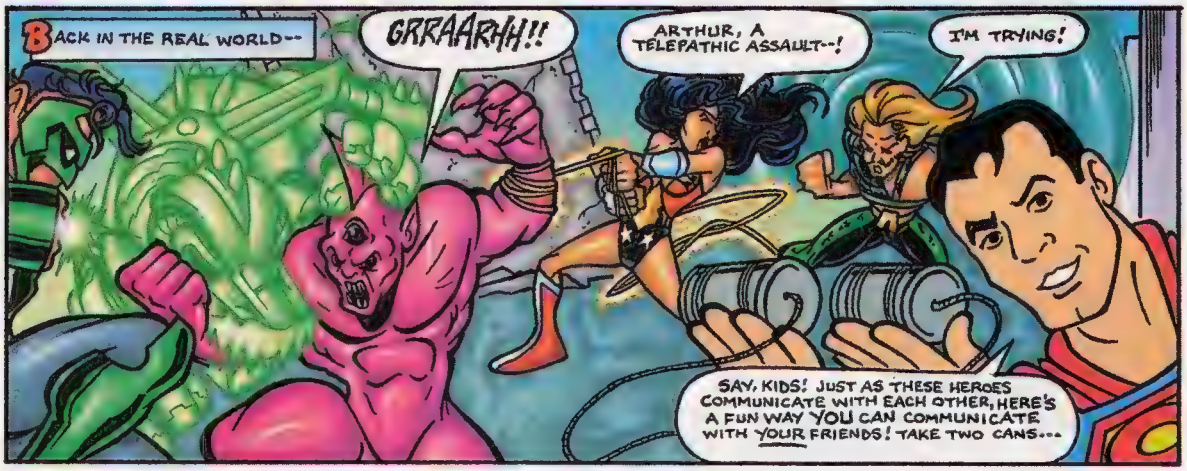
A JUSTICE ★ LEAGUE ★ ADVENTURE

HEADS UP, GUYS-- SOMETHING DID DROP IN ON US! AND THEY LOOK LIKE SIMPLIFIED VERSIONS OF SOME OF US! SUPERMAN, WONDER WOMAN,--
--THE MONKEY MUST BE YOUR STAND-IN, WEST!
HAR-DE-HAR-HAR, GANGRENE.
GREAT STARS! WHERE ARE WE?

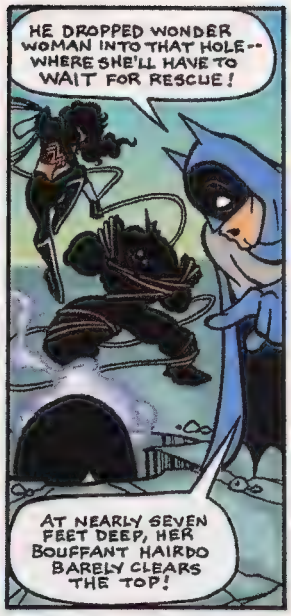
IF YOU GENTLEMEN ARE FINISHED, DESPERO'S NO LONGER DISORIENTED BY THAT VORTEX EFFECT!
COOKIE CUTTER LEAGUE OR NOT, IF WE DON'T CLEAR THE AREA, HE'LL MURDER EVERYONE IN SIGHT!

BY NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT! STRANGE, MONSTROUS CREATURES APPEARED OUT OF THIN AIR!
GOLLY, AQUAMAN, THEY MUST BE VILLAINS--SEE HOW SCARY-LOOKING THEY ARE!
NOW WHAT...

CLEARLY THESE CREATURES HAVE COME TO PROTECT THE EVIL GRAX--AND PREVENT US FROM FOILING HIS WICKED SCHEME!
YOU ARE TOO LATE! SOON, MY DEVILISH MACHINE WILL GIVE ALL PASSERSBY THE APPEARANCE OF CHEESE FONDUE--WITH CHIVES!!

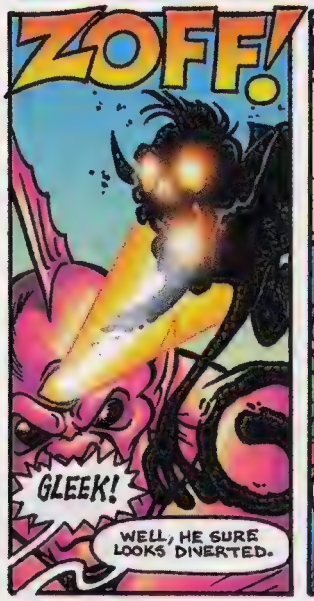

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD--
GRRAARHH!!
ARTHUR, A TELEPATHIC ASSAULT--!
I'M TRYING!
SAY, KIDS! JUST AS THESE HEROES COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER, HERE'S A FUN WAY YOU CAN COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR FRIENDS! TAKE TWO CANS...

HOLY HEAVY USE OF BLACKS, BATMAN! IT SURE IS DETAILED HERE!
HOLOGRAMS, MAYBE? IF THEY'RE DESPERO'S DOING--
I DON'T THINK SO.
DIE--AND BEGONE!
GREAT GALAXIES! THAT BEAST IS TROUNCING WONDER WOMAN! I MUST SIT HERE AND COMMENTATE!

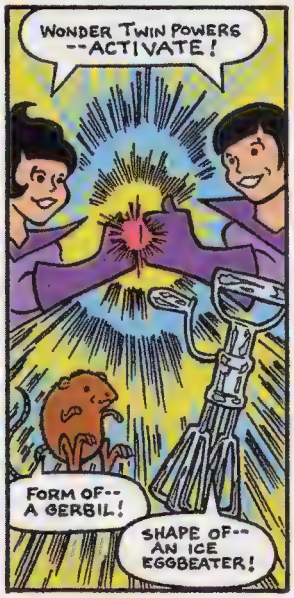

HE DROPPED WONDER WOMAN INTO THAT HOLE--WHERE SHE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR RESCUE!
AT NEARLY SEVEN FEET DEEP, HER BOUFFANT HAIRDO BARELY CLEARS THE TOP!

AND NOW I SHALL ATTEMPT TO FREEZE THE PINK MONSTER IN PLACE WITH MY SUPER-BREATH!
Y'KNOW, YOU GUYS WOULD BE A LOT MORE EFFECTIVE IF YOU DIDN'T ANNOUNCE EVERYTHING YOU DO FIRST!
YOU NOTICE THESE GUYS CAST NO SHADOWS?
HOLY HELPING HANDS! NOW I'LL HELP OUT BY--WHOOUGH!

SUPER FRIENDS, IT'S TIME FOR OUR SECRET WEAPON!
A MONKEY??
HE'LL DIVERT THE VILLAIN'S ATTENTION--AND ADD MUCH-NEEDED FLUFF SO AS NOT TO FRIGHTEN THE KIDDIES!
AND NOW I SHALL PASS OUT--!

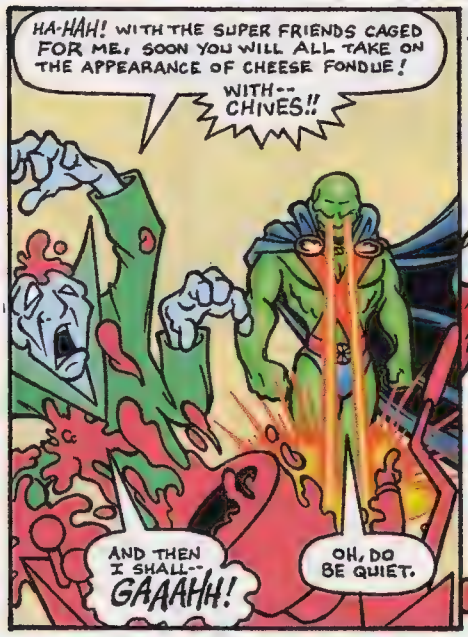

ZOFF!
GLEEK!
WELL, HE SURE LOOKS DIVERTED.

MEANWHILE, IN THE WORLD OF THE SUPER FRIENDS!
WHERE IS THAT BOOMING VOICE COMING FROM?
FEELS LIKE WE'RE CAUGHT IN AN OLD NEWSREEL.
CLEARLY, WE'RE IN ANOTHER DIMENSION.
JEEPERS, THESE FIERCE CREATURES MUST BE A BIGGER THREAT THAN GRAX!


WONDER TWIN POWERS --ACTIVATE!
FORM OF--A GERBIL!
SHAPE OF--AN ICE EGGBEATER!

WE-WE'RE HAVING NO EFFECT! THEY MUST BE IMMUNE TO OUR AMAZING POWERS!
WE'LL HELP, KIDS! I'LL SHINE LIGHT FROM MY POWER RING ON THEM!
I'LL RUN AROUND THEM VERY FAST!
AND I'LL REMAIN IN THE CORNER LIKE A USELESS PAPERWEIGHT UNTIL WATER IS INTRODUCED INTO THE STORY!

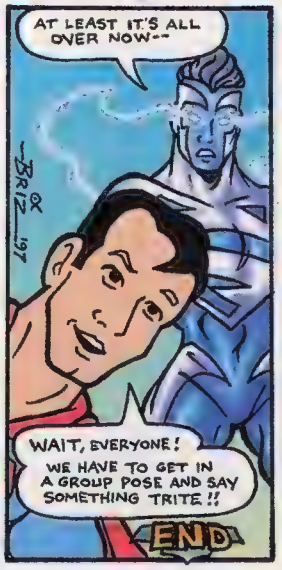
OH, PLEASE.
HE'S TRAPPED US IN SOME SORT OF ENERGY FIELD!
WE'VE NO CHOICE BUT TO STRIKE STOCK POSES AND LOOK CONCERNED!


HA-HAH! WITH THE SUPER FRIENDS CAGED FOR ME, SOON YOU WILL ALL TAKE ON THE APPEARANCE OF CHEESE FONDUE!
WITH-- CHIVES!!
AND THEN I SHALL-- GAAAHH!
OH, DO BE QUIET.

GASP!
VIOLENT, PHYSICAL CONTACT! YOU CAN'T DO THAT!
YOU HAVE TO TRICK HIM INTO LEAVING, OR SHUT OFF HIS DEADLY MACHINE-- AT MOST YOU SHOULD RESTRAIN HIM!
WHAT KIND OF MESSAGE ARE YOU SENDING?!
WE MUST SEND THEM BACK WHERE THEY CAME FROM!

I'LL RUN IN PLACE AND VIBRATE!
AND I'LL DEFLECT LIGHT FROM MY RING OFF YOU!
FORM OF A JUNEBUG!
SHAPE OF A MUD PUDDLE!
STROKE, JAYNA, STROKE!
IT'S ACTUALLY WORKING!
DESPITE THE FACT THEIR TECHNIQUE MAKES NO SENSE!

DIANA, THANK GOD! IS DESPERO--?
DON'T WORRY. THE INANITIES OF THE SUPER FRIENDS FINALLY GOT TO DESPERO AND HE HAD A BRAIN HEMORRHAGE.


AT LEAST IT'S ALL OVER NOW--
BRIZ '97
WAIT, EVERYONE! WE HAVE TO GET IN A GROUP POSE AND SAY SOMETHING TRITE!!
END

A
SMALL
WORLD?

With large publishers snatching up more and more independent titles, does the small press still exist?

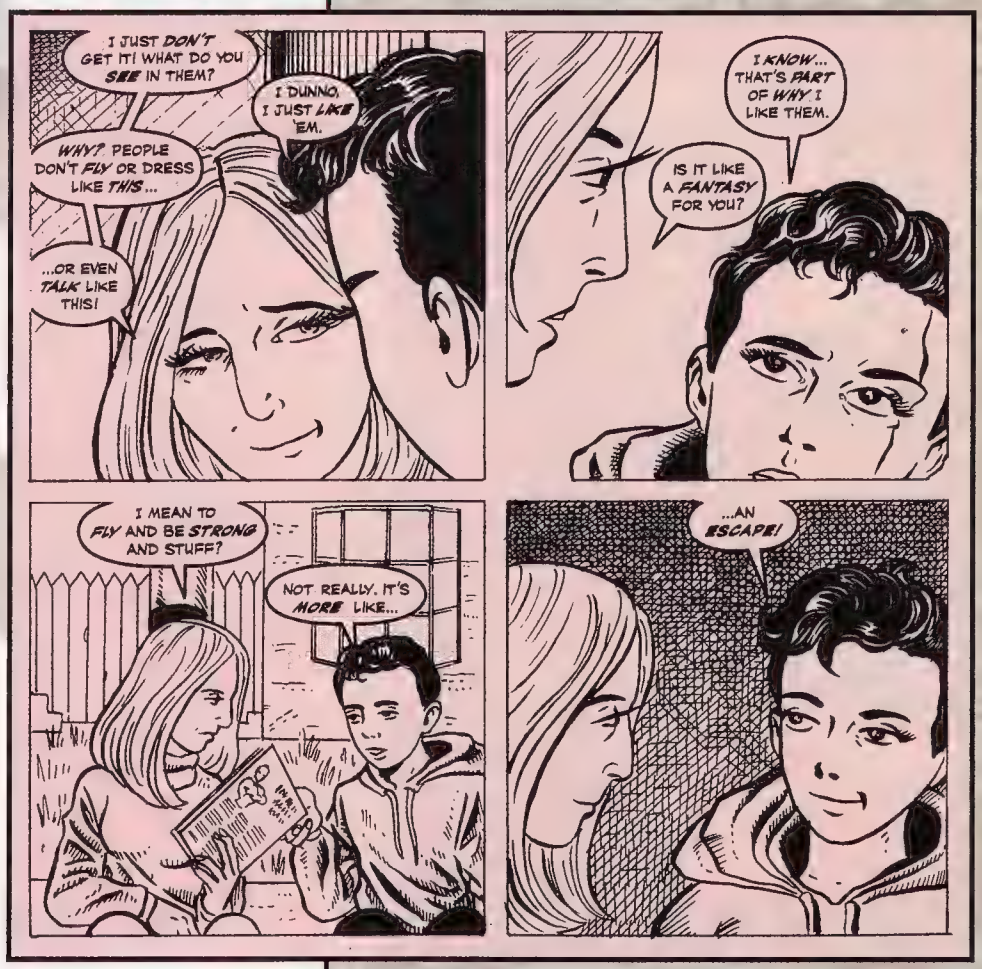
BY *TOM PALMER JR.*

Imagine a motley crew of long-haired world-shaping sorcerers, talking robot guns and wise-cracking dinosaurs. Guests on the next "Oprah"? Nope. Marvel's newest mutants? Sorry. They're the stars of the latest wave of small-press books to make the jump to a larger publishing company.

What's going on here? Even if you were the world's greatest psychic, you'd never have predicted that Image Comics—the industry's third largest publisher, known for its colorful high-profile superhero books—would count such diverse small-press books as the mystical fantasy *Starchild*, the political satire of *Ragmop* or the introspective autobiography of *A Touch of Silver* among its diverse line of comics.

And the trend isn't just isolated to Image. Small-press company Caliber Comics picked up several self-published books like *Dreamwalker* and *Patty Cake* to form its creator-owned Tapestry imprint. Sirius Entertainment has increased its profile by recruiting a number of small-press books, giving titles like *Poison Elves*, *Wandering Star*, *Poe* and *Sheba* a chance to shine. And for fan-favorite comics like *Bone* and *Strangers in Paradise*, it's a case of been there, done that—they've already made the jump to bigger waters at Image, only to recently return to their self-published roots, refreshed with higher visibility and sales.

It used to be easy to identify a small-press book (if it was black-and-white, and didn't feature superheroes, chances are it came from the small press), although they were often hard to find in comic stores. Now these books are easier to find, and tend to look more like their higher-profile competition, complete with glossy covers. With Image and other companies helping the small-press find a higher profile, you have to wonder, what qualifies as a small press book these days? And is the small press, as we've come to know it, in danger of becoming extinct?



Jeff Smith's Bone *(left) and Jim Valentino's* A Touch of Silver *(above)*

JUMPING SHIP

Everywhere you turn nowadays, there's news of some small-press creator seeking refuge at Image, but for Jeff Smith and Terry Moore the trend is yesterday's news. They've already played among the big boys, only to recently return to their self-publishing roots. For Smith, taking the mega-popular *Bone* to Image Comics over two years ago provided an opportunity to try something new. "It was like taking your guitar and plugging it in," he recalls. "It was an experiment, and it definitely worked out in the end." According to Smith, he was able to increase his profile with the Image "I" on his cover and ensure that the Bone story got told at a time when the industry's future was uncertain.

It was a similar story for Terry Moore, who moved his fan-favorite *Strangers in Paradise* to Jim Lee's Homage Comics line in '96. "My readership can only grow so much as an independent book," Moore says. "Anything Jim Lee prints goes into every store in the world, so if anybody could have helped me bust the ceiling that independent books have, he could. I've had tremendous response from people who never tried *Strangers in Paradise* until it became an Homage book and now they've been won over. I count that as a real success."

While it may have shocked a few people when *Bone* and *Strangers in Paradise* joined Image, many were just as surprised when Smith and Moore announced they'd be returning to self-publishing. Being in complete control of their books was the main reason for the publishing switch.

"Publishing *Bone* myself was just as much of my identity as the actual comic book," Smith admits. "I think other people knew that just as much as I did. When I went back to Cartoon Books, there was this wave of goodwill directed towards me. People really like that I'm doing it myself again." ■ *TP*

CHANGING ITS IMAGE

A few short years ago, small-press comics were the comic industry's best-kept secret. Self-published comics like Dave Sim's *Cerebus* or Martin Wagner's *Hepcats* trudged along with little or no attention from the mainstream—only a small but loyal cult following kept them going. Small companies like Fantagraphics or Kitchen Sink Press gave cartoonists a chance to let loose, but with little or no financial reward. Most superhero fans ignored anything that wasn't in color, and small-press books—being predominantly black-and-white—got lost on comic store shelves.

"There used to be a large number of stores that were completely out of touch with the industry," *Strangers in Paradise* creator Terry Moore remembers. "It didn't matter what your book was—if they didn't know about it, they wouldn't try it."

Sure, *Cerebus* cultivated a growing following and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* exploded onto the scene, spawning cartoons and toys. But neither of these two blips on the small-press radar really brought other small-press books to the forefront. That all changed in the early '90s, when Jeff Smith's *Bone* hit it big. Here was a comic nobody had heard of, but through sheer word-of-mouth, this lighthearted fantasy adventure started racking up sales figures rivaling those of Marvel and DC titles. Suddenly, the small press was the place to be.

"I'M A BIG FAN OF SUPERHERO COMICS, BUT I LOVE PIZZA TOO. I JUST DON'T WANT TO EAT IT EVERY DAY."

—JIM VALENTINO ON ALTERNATIVE TITLES

Bone's enormous success cast a huge spotlight on the rest of the small press, and it wasn't long before the lines between the mainstream and the alternative crowd started to blend. Small-press creators like Colleen Doran (*A Distant Soil*), Terry LaBan (*Cud*) and Terry Moore (*Strangers in Paradise*) garnered some freelance work from Marvel, DC and Image, while Sim's tenacious aardvark Cerebus actually popped up in an issue of Todd McFarlane's high-selling *Spawn*.

With mainstream attention like this, it's hard to figure out just what exactly qualifies as a small-press book nowadays. "I don't think there's a good definition of what a small-press book is," says Brian Michael Bendis, creator of *Jinx*. "Is *Bone* a small-press book? It's outselling some of the Marvel line! I think the way to tell if a book is part of the small press is to look at the intent of the creators. Are they trying to have a mainstream hit or are they just trying to do something for themselves?"

Others feel that the whole term of "small-press" is becoming obsolete. "Maybe the best way to describe a small-press book is to call it a personal book," Moore proposes. "It's personal as opposed to several guys sitting around trying to think of something that appeals to the masses."

Things have certainly gotten more complicated now that mainstream companies like Image have started publishing small-press comics. Instead of giving books like *Jinx* or *ESPers* a boost of color to fit in with the rest of the company's titles, Image has kept the books' black-and-white format.

For Image co-founder Jim Valentino, the man behind Image's new wave of non-superhero books, it's okay that the new cousins of *Spawn* and *WildC.A.T.s* don't sport vibrant hues. It gives the company a way to expand its offerings from the usual superhero fare. "I'm a big fan of superhero comics," says Valentino, "but I love pizza too. I just don't want

to eat it every day."

Savage Dragon creator Erik Larsen, who took *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and Colleen Doran's *A Distant Soil* under his wing, is also open to expanding the boundaries. When it came to bringing more books to Image, he didn't care about color or popularity; he only had one thing in mind. "I just wanted to publish some good comics," he says. "It didn't matter that they were small-press books. If Image wants to survive, it has to diversify its line of books. Why shouldn't we be doing comics people like?"

Small Fish in a Big Pond

With a big company like Image throwing its considerable muscle into the alternative ring, and more and more small-press creators popping up out of the woodwork, it seems the small press no longer lives up to its name.

"All you have to do is look at the market shares," Doran proposes. "The alternative books—if you include Image's black-and-white stuff and DC's Vertigo line—is at least a quarter of the market. None of these comics sell big amounts, but there are a lot of them out there."

If there's one thing the small press' growth has proven, it's that fans are more receptive to trying new comics, no matter what they're about or who publishes them. "Think about it," Bendis says. "As a movie fan, do you care if a movie comes out from Paramount or Warner Bros.? Hell, no! If I bring *Jinx* to a bigger company, it only means that it gives me more of an audience and allows me to focus on the book more."

With so many small-press titles floating about out there, however, this section of the market is starting to get a little crowded. New self-publishers keep pumping out books month after month, making it harder and harder for that one special comic to make its presence known. Many small-press creators even acknowledge that there's a definite danger of oversaturating the market.

"There's an awful lot of comics out there that shouldn't be published because the overall quality is poor," Larsen says. "Those kinds of books hurt the people who are doing black-and-white comics that are really good. Some people see these comics and write off all black-and-white comics as garbage, and that's not true at all. It bothers me when there are good comics coming out that aren't building any audience."

Brian Michael Bendis' Jinx moved to Image and he hopes he'll reap its rewards.

A Shadow Cave.
An unmatched twin.
An accident-prone pilot.
A giant space whale.

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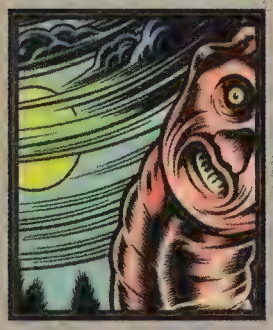
SMALL-PRESS GEMS

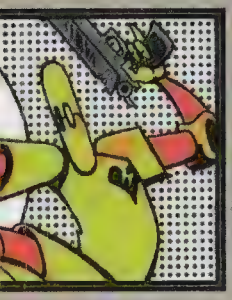
WIZARD'S TOP FIVE SMALL-PRESS BOOKS YOU SHOULD BE READING

BACCHUS What happens when all the ancient Greek gods get old and die? That's the question posed by Eddie Campbell Comics' long-running *Bacchus* series. Set in modern times, it features Bacchus, the salty, old god of wine, as he sets off on globe-trotting adventures, or simply passes the time telling stories to a captive audience in some seedy bar. Grab on to this satirical *Bacchus* before last call.



BLACK HOLE Think you've got it bad with zits and trying to fit in with the "cool" crowd? If only the teens in Fantagraphics' *Black Hole* had those kinds of problems. Ya see, there's this nasty, mysterious plague going around that disfigures teens or turns them into horrible monsters. The crisp artwork helps tell this bizarre horror story/sick-and-twisted romance comic. Think "Beverly Hills, 90210" meets "Outbreak."

MISTER BLANK Who do you trust? For mild-mannered Sam Smith, that's a tough question to answer. Should he follow the bizarre Doctor Ixcel or the mysterious Mr. Locke, head of the faceless corporation N Industries, where Sam works? Our hero's got zero time to figure things out, as he's quickly thrust into the middle of a loony adventure. You'll have little time to catch your breath from the non-stop action in Amaze Ink's *Mister Blank*.



SCUD Wimps like the Punisher and Boba Fett have got nothin' on Scud. Y'see, Scud's part of a series of robot assassins set to self-destruct upon killing their original programmed targets. But after seriously wounding his initial prey, Scud realized he didn't want to die. So the lovable killer became a freelance assassin, earning dough to keep his original target alive in the hospital. Nothing can top the fast-paced, madcap cartoon violence of Fireman Press' *Scud*.

SQUEE Remember all the really weird stuff that went through your head when you were a kid? Well, Jhonen Vasquez, creator of *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*, does and he's packed it all into Slave Labor Graphics' *Squee*, his new book that features the misadventures of the big-eyed, manic title character. This one's got it all: bloodthirsty grandparents who want to kill their grandkids, the demonic Tickle Me Hellmo doll and strange, grunting men in overflowing public toilets. ■*TP*

Valentino also realizes that the small press is flooded. "Is there too much small-press stuff out there?" he asks. "I would counter that there are too many X-Men books. When I look at a comic, I look at craftsmanship in terms of idea and execution. There is just as much crap in the small press as there is in the mainstream. It's just your *definition* of crap that's at question."

While many creators share these concerns, some add that aspiring comic artists need a chance to grow. "Sure, there are a lot of hacks out there, but who are we to criticize them?" Moore asks. "I think they should have an environment to make small-press books; that's what the arts is all about. I wish the business side was a little more supportive of *avant garde* material. The next thing you know, you've got the next Kurt Busiek or Mark Waid. You've got to give people enough time to grow up in the industry. It's not good for an art medium to shoot people down in their first three or four attempts."

Of course, just like everything else, it's survival of the fittest in the small press. If you're good, people will take notice. If you're not, well...let's just say you'll find out pretty quickly. "The market will weed out the bad stuff," Doran predicts. "Either the creators will push harder and the books will get better, or they'll just go away."

LOSING LOYALTY

One of the biggest factors threatening the small press is the possibility of fan apathy. When a small-press book makes the leap to a bigger company, it runs the risk of alienating some die-hard fans. Once *Bone* and *Strangers in Paradise* joined Image (see "jumping Ship" sidebar), they had to contend with readers saying they had "sold out" or that the quality of the comics would go down. The same thing has happened to the new group of Image books. While some fans have voiced their negative opinions, the creators have stood their ground. "Nobody's sold out," Bendis states. "When my fans first heard about *Jinx* being published by Image, they thought it was going to be in color, or I was going to have a *WetWorks* crossover. But when the book came out and it was just the same as before, they realized I was just trying to do better for myself. When R.E.M. and U2 went from big college-level rock to mainstream

Poe *(below)* and Kiss & Tell *(opposite)* both left their self-publishing roots to join Sirius' Dog Star Press imprint.

rock, their college audience said, 'Screw you,' but they did nothing but make better music."

If sentiments of selling out don't break the small press down, some think a gradual breaking up of the partnerships and friendships that previously existed will. The small press used to be almost a family unto itself, with each member struggling to keep his book aloft while extending a helping hand to another creator in need. Apparently, those times have changed. "I don't see the buddy system that used to be there," Moore says. "I think that the small press is divided and conquered. The books and the creators seem more like islands; they're all on their own and it's sink or swim by yourself."

Doran acknowledges that it's been hard for the small press to stay together from time to time, but she feels things are okay now. "A few years ago, people thought that you had to self-publish or else you weren't truly one of the faithful," she says. "But I don't see any of that lately. People are just happy to hear that you're surviving and your book is still around."

The Future

With so many obstacles in the way, the future of the small press as we knew it is a little shaky. There's the threat of overcrowdedness, making it difficult for certain books to get the recognition they deserve. Not to mention the sheer amount of sub-par books, which can easily turn readers off to the whole small-press community. But enough people are confident that there will always be room for personal comics amongst the mainstream. "I think they'll still be around," Larsen says. "The people who do these books are so incredibly committed to getting the word out there. They are the people who truly love comics more than anything else."

In the immediate future, though, small-press creators are just working on creating a better place for their books. "It's my hope that people will feel less like drawing a line in the sand and saying, 'I like this kind of stuff and I don't like anything else,'" Smith says. "It's the best of times and the worst of times right now for the small press.

"There's definitely a feeling of acceptance toward small-press books by the general comics community at large than there ever has been. But I also think it's that much harder to get people to risk spending their money on your book. Readers just need to take a chance and check out a lot of the great stuff the small press has to offer." W

Tom Palmer Jr., assistant editor for Wizard's *sister magazine* ToyFare: The Toy Magazine, *can press about 12 pounds. That's pretty small, ain't it?*

Wizard *casts the* X-Men *movie!*

Casting Call

By a bunch of Wizard staffers

All photos are from theEverett Collection unless otherwise noted.

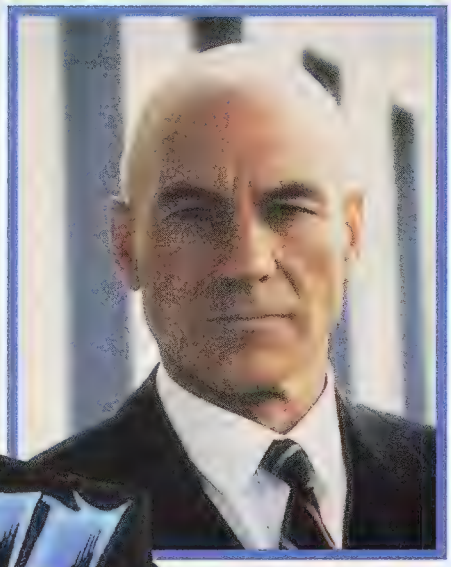
Sure as death and taxes, there *will* be an X-Men film.

Details are spotty at best, but it's likely Marvel's hotter-than-molten-lava mutants will see screen time before the millennium. No one's been cast, and the script's still being penned, but if you listen closely, you can hear the sound of a zillion X-fans' hearts racing in anticipation.

Few things in this world could rival the thrill of seeing the X-Men done by Hollywood. Forget Goobers and Raisinets; pacemakers and oxygen tanks would be needed to keep fans' enthusiasm in check while the film is running. The movie should have epic battles, titanic heroes, and villains so foul, they'd make everyone's collective toes curl.

Fret not, dear reader. We can't wait for this, so *Wizard*'s whipped up a Grade-A list of actors we'd want to see in an X-Men flick. We may have cast two X-Men films already (in *Wizard* #41 and in #70's look at "Age of Apocalypse"), but the time is ripe for another go. For one thing, the X-Men have added a bunch of new members. For another...heck, it's just too cool not to do.

Fire up the popcorn. Here're our picks for "X-Men: The Motion Picture." Save us a good spot in the front row, and make sure there's no cinemuck under the seat.



PROFESSOR X

The distant and intellectual founder of the X-Men has a real-life counterpart in Patrick Stewart. As Jean-Luc Picard on "Star Trek: The Next Generation," Stewart played a walking (and spaceship-commanding) Professor X.

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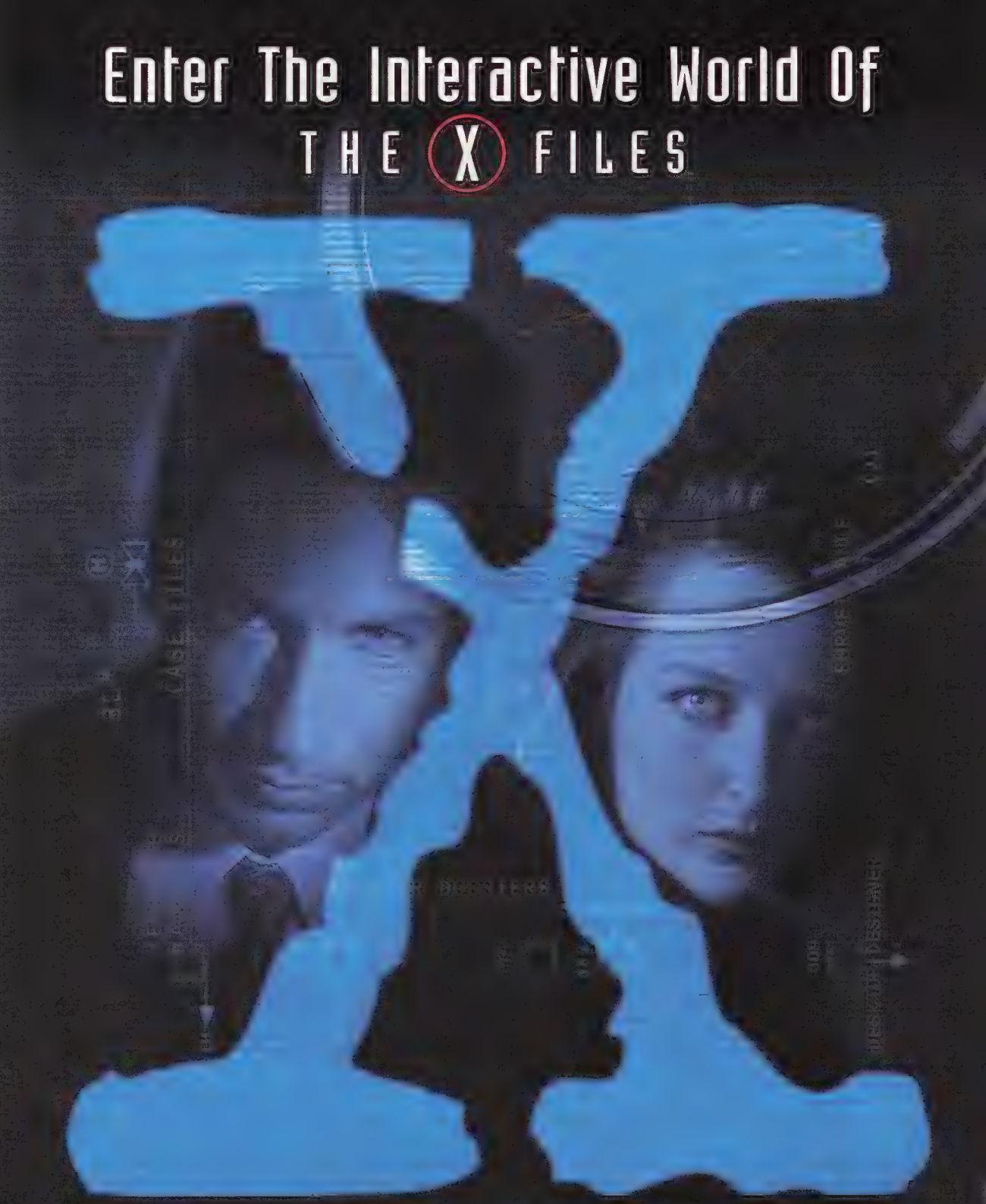

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CYCLOPS

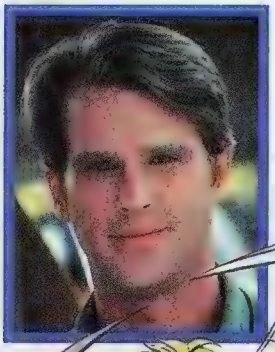
Slap a visor on Michael Biehn's face and the X-Men's cunning field leader Cyclops would come to life. With his good looks and soft-spoken manner, Biehn ("Aliens," "The Terminator") has all the tools to lead this team of actors into battle.

PHOENIX

Physical similarities aside, Nicole Kidman would be the perfect Jean Grey. She's played the smart, self-assured, sexy heroine in both "Batman Forever" and "The Peacemaker."

WOLVERINE

And this year's Oscar for most psychotic hero goes to...Robert De Niro ("Cape Fear," "Copland") for his truly frightening turn as Wolverine!



ANGEL

Rip off the aerodynamic Angel's wings, wipe that stupid blue paint off his mug and—Wow!—there's Cary Elwes ("The Crush"). Elwes can play a charismatic, haughty and aloof character like Angel in his sleep.

Kenku Alston/Outline

ICEMAN

Beneath Iceman's cold heart, there's a real wise-ass waiting to heat things up. Craig Kilborn from "The Daily Show" packs a tremendous sense of humor and he'd be the coolest man of ice ever.

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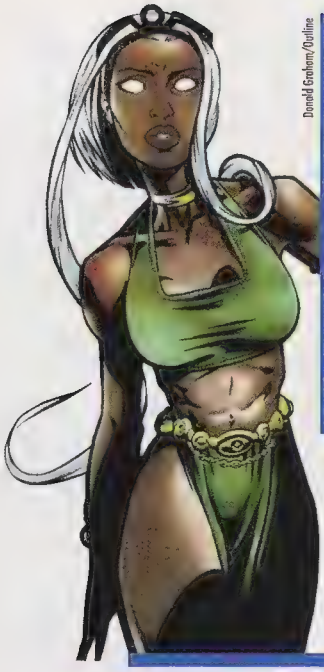


Donald Graham/Outline

STORM

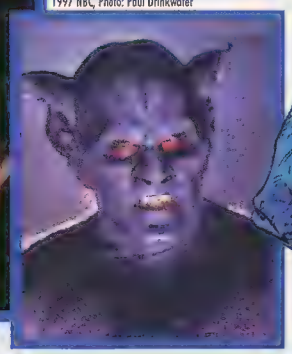
Who better to play a goddess than a goddess? Model/actress Iman is a lock to put the "storm" in Storm. (And she has a cool African accent, just like the team's weather controller!)

ROGUE

Southern belle Rogue is tough as nails and as beautiful as an Arizona sunrise. Charisma Carpenter from TV's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" is all that—and a side order of onion rings.

Gerardo Somoza/Outline

1997 NBC, Photo: Paul Drinkwater



BEAST

Indubitably, the loquacious and exuberant gadabout Beast requires an erudite vocalization, which, we hypothesize, might be splendiferously dispensed by Sam Neill ("Jurassic Park"). The Beast's *corpus* would emerge via special-effects artistry.

BISHOP

Buff and bold with a penetrating gaze, Morris Chestnut from "Boyz N the Hood" has the U.S.D.A.'s recommended daily allowance of Bishopness. He's the guy we'd *have* to sign to play the time-displaced mutant.

PSYLOCKE

The silent-but-deadly ninja Psylocke would smoke like a forest fire when played by Tia Carrere. Carrere ("Wayne's World") is sultry and slinky enough to creep into our hearts—and then rip them out.

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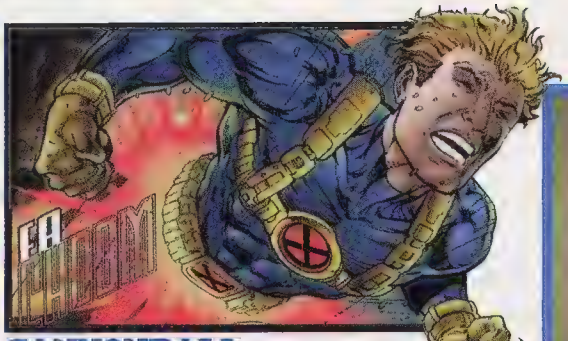


CANNONBALL

In the telefilm "It," Jonathan Brandis proved he could play a convincing stuterrer. Now, he'll put that vocal talent to good use, saying "y'all" and "ah'm" a lot in Cannonball's thick southern accent.

MARROW

Twisted and certifiable, Marrow is the X-Men's newest basket case. Fairuza Balk, with her piercing stare and creepy laugh (check out "The Craft") is bent just right for Marrow.

Carlo Dalla Chiesa/Outline

GAMBIT

The actor playing X-Men's sneaky Cajun burglar Gambit has to be a dashingly handsome charmer—just like Patrick Muldoon was every week on "Melrose Place."

1998 NBC/Foto Fantasies

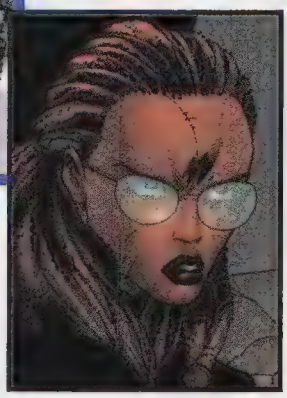
MAGGOTT

It takes a lunatic to pal around with giant maggots as the Australian mutant Maggott does. The Australian lunatic Jacko (from the Energizer commercials) takes lunacy to a loony new level.

Greg Lasy/Outline

DR. CECILIA REYES

When the antibiotics are flying, Gloria Reuben shows both strength of will and sensitivity in her role as a doctor on "ER." That strength and sensitivity would breathe life into the reluctant mutant Dr. Reyes.



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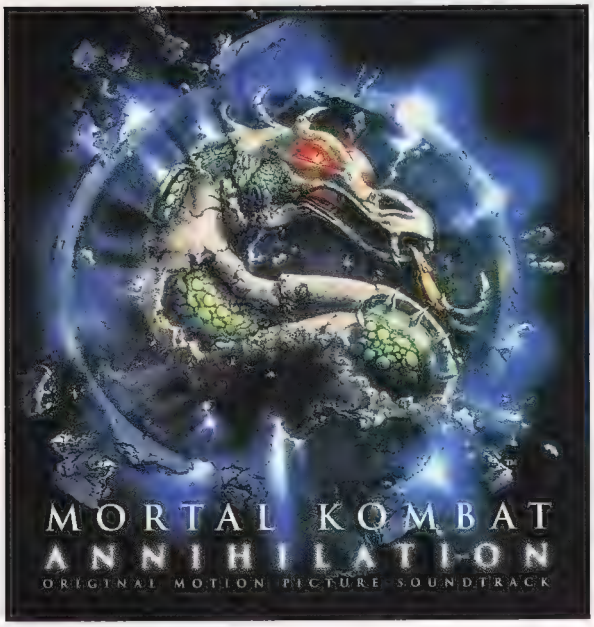

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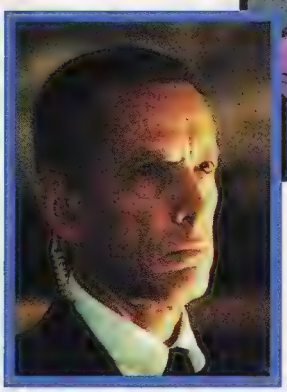
MR. SINISTER

Russell Crowe ("Virtuosity") has a Ph.D. in creepiness. He'd mold the evil Mr. Sinister into the most scheming, conniving rat-bastard Hollywood has ever seen.

BASTION

As a twisted Secret Service agent in "Absolute Power," Scott Glenn had a steely stare and intense personality perfectly suited for the evil, robotic Bastion.



APOCALYPSE

Criminal mastermind Apocalypse is both terrifyingly huge and hugely terrifying. To carry the part, we'd recommend hulking (and imposing) actor Brian Thompson from "The X-Files."

MAGNETO

None of this "Joseph" crap for us. Our Magneto would be a brooding, barely restrained hard-case, ready to lash out at the slightest provocation. Rutger Hauer ("Blade Runner") has made a science out of playing such characters.

SABRETOOTH

The claws that catch and jaws that bite could only be provided by Hollywood magic, but Clancy Brown's ("Highlander") physique and edgy nature would fill Sabretooth's shoes and spark his psychotic personality. W

Darryl Estrine/Outline

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THE WIZARD Q&A:

Todd McFarlane's got a problem.

While checking last-minute page proofs for *Spawn* #65, he discovers that, dammit, there's a mistake: Spawn has this habit of scrawling messages on his victims, but on this one particular page there's a victim, but no message. "I just forgot to put it in," says McFarlane, shaking his head. "I inked this page, but I just plain forgot. Tell me, do you think it works without it?" Ummm...not really, Todd. "Damn. Get me the printers!"

A couple of frantic phone calls, a few Xeroxes and one fax later, the problem's fixed, at least for the moment. There remains one much larger problem, though, one that's not so easily solved: With 1998 looming large, how can McFarlane possibly top his success of this past year?

Hands down, 1997 was The Year of Spawn. With an animated HBO series, a feature film, successful toy lines and two best-selling comic books, McFarlane's unique creation finally achieved media empire status. But whereas most modern-day empires operate out of New York or L.A. penthouses, McFarlane governs his from the office above his garage in Phoenix, Arizona. Granted, it's a really nice office over a really huge garage, but it's still *an office over a garage*, not at all the kind of place you'd expect to find Todd McFarlane, the nation's newest Media Mogul.

Evidence of McFarlane's success lies scattered everywhere. Dozens of awards line his shelves; hundreds of Spawn toys sit in their original packaging; a wealth of signed sports memorabilia, most of it hockey-related, hangs on his walls; there's even two rare Madonna dresses in glass cabinet displays. Yet there are also subtle reminders that this remains McFarlane's home: Post-it notes are affixed to computers to remind him to pick up his daughter Cyan at school in a few hours; looking beyond the mound of work on McFarlane's desk, there's a swingset visible through the window; and his wife Wanda works at the desk next to him, always ready to remind him with a laugh, "Remember, you make the decisions, but I run the show." All in all, there's a strange sense of humility to this Kingdom of Spawn.

Since breaking into comics in the 1980s and breathing life into Marvel's slumping Hulk and Spider-Man titles, McFarlane's seen the industry take a wild roller-coaster ride. Yet in spite of constant temptations to leave, McFarlane remains committed to comic books, although he harbors anger and bitterness over the industry's current recession. In many ways, he built Spawn into a huge corporate machine to help revive the slumping business he loves so passionately, and he's frustrated that it hasn't had more of a positive impact.

His wife sits nearby, flagging phone calls and throwing in the occasional wifely put-down while McFarlane tries to wolf down his lunch. Between various crises and around mouthfuls of long-cold pasta, Todd manages to ponder and address the question, "As popular as Spawn was in 1997, what could possibly be next?"

AFTER A YEAR WHICH INCLUDED AN HBO CARTOON, A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE, AN EXPLODING TOY LINE, AND TWO BEST-SELLING COMICS, TODD McFARLANE PLOTS HIS NEXT CONQUEST

By Scott Brick

McFarlane photos by Jim McHugh

Movie photo at right © 1997 New Line Cinema.

McFarlane

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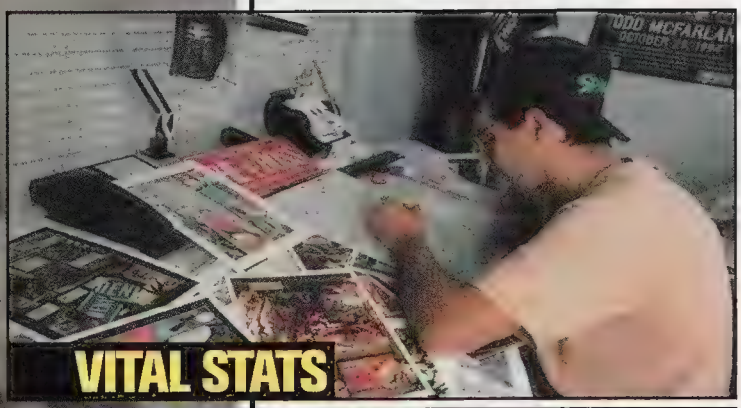
"The next 'Spawn' movie has got to go forward. It has to be a much better movie."

–TODD McFARLANE



VITAL STATS

Name: Todd McFarlane
Occupation: Writer/artist/Media Mogul
Born: March 16, 1961 in Calgary, Alberta
Base of Operations: Above his garage in Phoenix, Ariz.
Career Highlights: In the early 1990s, his *Spider-Man* series brought the character to new heights in popularity and sales. He co-founded Image Comics in 1992 and published his best-selling *Spawn* comic book, which has since branched out into toy lines, an HBO animated series, a feature film through New Line Cinema and the spinoff series *Curse of the Spawn*.
Favorite Hockey Team: Phoenix Coyotes

WIZARD: Not many people in any form of entertainment can claim such huge successes as you had with Spawn in 1997. Do you think it's fair to say this was The Year of Spawn?

McFARLANE: The weird thing is, when you're doing it, you don't really see yourself doing what the people on the outside see you doing. About three years ago, when we didn't have the toys or we didn't have the movie or TV [series], I still got up and I still worked in this office over the garage. The surroundings don't change, so the only thing that does change is your mental state. On some levels, it's very dangerous to start believing your own press.

Does Spawn's '97 success represent a pinnacle for you, or do you think there's greater times to come?

A lot of people thought, "Wow, you've got your movie and you've got your TV [show]; you've climbed the mountain." In my way of thinking, it's really almost the beginning of another trek. I see it as the same as when you break into comic books. The goal is to eventually hone your abilities and maybe do Spider-Man or Batman and create a name for yourself. It takes years to get to that point, though.

Getting into the [entertainment] business is just the start. People say, "Oh, you've got your movie; that's it, you can now go to your grave." But I'm not here going, "Look at what we did." I'm saying, "We've just begun another odyssey, it's just in another arena called the public."

You've managed to stay on your book far longer than many of your Image contemporaries stayed on theirs. Why is that?

On some levels I'm an oddball, because I've stuck around. Given that I've got all these other tugs pulling at me, all these other arenas, I've stuck with my comic book, but I could leave in a heartbeat. I've got a thousand opportunities to leave the comic book community and I don't, because I either love comic books and I'm a smart guy, or I'm a f---ing doorknob because I'm sticking around in a place that doesn't care. I don't think you're going to find another guy being able to accomplish what I've been able to accomplish, and—the key word being "and," here—staying on their comic book for 65 issues. I'm not saying this as an ego stroke; it's just fact. [Image partner] Jim Lee left [on a sabbatical from comics] when the "WildC.A.T.s" cartoon started on TV, and he wasn't even running that show. Will you see Joe Quesada get an animated show? Maybe, but he'd drop his comic book. They're gone, they're out of there, and they don't even have nearly the temptations I've got. I've got movies, I've got TV. And with all of that, I'm still staying.

Do you think the day will ever come that you will leave?

[*Nodding his head, slowly*] The day might come where I just go, "I can create [a product] and show it to millions, or I can create and show it to 100,000." As a creator, you want people to see your creation. These are my children and I want the world to see them. That's probably what will lead me out of comic books.

Before that day comes, will you ever return to penciling?

[*Shrugs*] I'll do the odd thing, but in terms of regular penciling? [*Shakes his head*] I think [current *Spawn* penciler] Greg Capullo is a superior artist to me, so part of that is I'm just afraid that if I ever came back people would say, "You suck—Greg Capullo's awesome!" I think he's a better artist than me.

Really?

I'm not just saying that because I think Greg's going to read the article; I believe that. I could give you a list of other people who are head and shoulders above me. I need to go out there and put the best product possible out. I need to get someone whose head is in it, but as long as I'm still writing it, it's going to have the same flavor. I give some directorial stuff to Greg so you still have Todd-isms in there. I still ink it, so that flavor's still there.

Several of your Image partners have already moved on to second or third characters...

[*Between bites of pasta*] Yeah, but with Spawn, I'm a one-trick pony right now. The thing is, I don't run him hard all the time, I treat him good, I put him in the barn, I brush him, I make sure he sleeps and he's warm, and that way he's ready for another race another day.

Will you ever do other characters?

If we go back to the idea that these are my creative children, then it's tough for me to just reproduce for the sake of reproducing and then put the "children" up for adoption. I'm a guy who will probably only have three really good ideas in his life—three kids to raise properly. I don't know that my wife and I could raise 20 of them. [*Wanda laughs in the background; Todd smiles*]

Given the tremendous success in '97, can Spawn be as successful, or even more successful, in 1998?

"I either love comic books and I'm a smart guy, or I'm a f---ing doorknob because I'm sticking around in a place that doesn't care."
—TODD McFARLANE ON WHY HE'S STUCK WITH HIS COMIC BOOK

TODD'S OPINIONS

Here's what the forthcoming McFarlane has to say about the following big events of 1997.

THE NEW SUPERMAN—*In a year from now, he's going to look exactly the same as he did before the change. If it's permanent, then God bless them, and I'll be the first guy to say thanks for clearing some of the dust off this character.*

"HEROES REBORN: THE RETURN"—*More gimmicks. These big events, I don't think there's any long-term thought process put in.*

"BATMAN & ROBIN"—*I haven't seen the last two. I thought the first two sucked. They're just bad for a guy who's 36 years old, like me. I'm beyond that. If I was in charge of that franchise, I would update it.*

ROB LIEFELD'S FIGHTING AMERICAN CONTROVERSY—*On some level, I think the courts made the right decision. Rob tries to give his spin that he never intended this to be a rip-off of Captain America, and it was never some of the Captain America pages, but that's all bullsh--. He's a funny kid.*

NICOLAS CAGE AS SUPERMAN—*I don't get it. Is he a draw? Yeah, I get it on that level, but to the puritans, to the comic book geeks like me, is he Superman? I'm trying to figure it out, but I can't get it.* ■ *SB*

You have plans, but it becomes tough. And even if I do it, how do I top that in '99? You can't do it; you're eventually going to give yourself a bleeding ulcer, or you just have to go, "We're going to have down times." But I always assume there's going to be down times, so if we have any success it's a bonus. I'd rather have low expectations and go, "Woo-hoo!"

Spawn is at the point now where he's becoming a brand name. You just recognize the name; it doesn't mean that you buy any of the product, it doesn't even mean that you endorse the brand, but you're aware of it. It's not about buying stuff. It's the equivalent of going up to my grandmother and saying, "You know who Superman is?" "Yeah, sure." Now, I know for a fact Grandma has never bought anything Superman for the last 50 years, right? But she's aware of him. The goal is, can I get Spawn to that kind of level?

Getting back to comics, how has your relationship with your former Image partner Rob Liefeld changed in 1997?

[*Laughs*] He's a funny kid. I think he's the last guy on the planet to know that nobody cares about him anymore. He talks, but there's nobody listening. It's unbelievable how he can make the glass half-full when it's half-empty. "I'm stronger for going to war against Marvel and Image." Every one of his defeats he can make sound good. "I needed to downsize." No, everybody quit because you weren't paying them! The one that amused me the most was where he said, "I couldn't wait to get out of Image." For six months, and I'll show you the f---ing bill, for six months he and his lawyers prevented us from trying to get him out of the company. For six months they blocked it, every time we tried to get him out he blocked it, and I just read where he said, "I couldn't wait to get out; I wanted to do nothing but leave." Yeah? Well, then, why did we both get $50,000 bills saying the exact opposite? [*Laughs and shakes his head*] Funny kid.

WANDA [*Not looking away from her computer screen*]: That's just your opinion, though. You could be wrong, like Dennis Miller.

McFARLANE [*Laughs*]: Yeah, I could be the next Dennis Miller. "That's just my opinion; I could be wrong."

Let's move on to another antagonist: Marvel Comics. There've been rumors that you and Marvel are cooking something up. Any truth to it?

[*Rolls his eyes and shakes his head*] Have I had contact with Marvel? Yeah. It seems like every time they get a new head guy, I get a phone call. It's pretty weird. If the simple question is, would I do stuff like Rob [Liefeld] and Jim [Lee] are doing? No. That's short-term and it's small and it's finite, and it doesn't add to any growth in the industry. It doesn't make our cottage community stronger, given that it's shrinking. It makes a blip, but so what? You make a few bucks and I make a few bucks, but what is it going to do? I don't need the bucks. What I need is a strong, growing community. But who knows what happens if they go bankrupt? If something crazy happens, don't count out that I'm not right there in the middle of the craziness.

You've stated before that to go back to Marvel would be like eating crow. But wouldn't it be more like you've won? That they've admitted they can't succeed as well without you?

I'm so pigheaded that even if it was a great deal, and even if I needed to do it, I still wouldn't. I'd literally cut my nose off to spite my face, just because I said I won't go back to the beast. The simple reason is, Marvel's in the past. I don't look behind. I don't reminisce about high school, either. [Marvel] was '91 and before; it's not my life anymore. The only way I would come back is if somehow I was the lord, you know what I mean? If they said to me, "Todd, you're in charge of Marvel and you're the ruler of all time, space and dimensions, and you can rule it all from out over

With 1997 being The Year of Spawn, McFarlane's goal for '98 is to get Grandma to be aware of Spawn.

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your garage," I might take a look at it.

Will there be a sequel to the "Spawn" film?

They don't have to make it official until December 1, but they've made it clear they're leaning toward picking up the option on the sequel. Again, it wasn't like a home run. The company called it a solid double, which I think is a fair assessment in terms of box-office success.

Were you happy with the film?

[*Almost leaping out of his chair*] I expected "Spawn" to be the #1 movie that [first] week and "Air Force One" beat me, and it bugged me for three days. #2? That's like being the Patriots [losers of last season's Super Bowl]. People say you should be happy to be #2, but I say go talk to the Patriots when they walked off the field on that January day and ask them how good they felt. They didn't come in first, dammit!

But am I proud of our efforts? Yup. Do I think we can improve on some things if we did a sequel? Yeah, sure. Was it a learning experience? Yeah. What you hope for is, if you do a sequel, you take what you did good and you carry it over. You improve on what was average, and you let go of what was bad. The next one has got to go forward. It can't be a sequel just for the sake of being a sequel; it has to be a much better movie.

What's in the works for the HBO series in '98?

Well, we have a commitment for 18 episodes in 1998. I want to get guest voices like they do on "The Simpsons"; I want to make it a little bit of an event. As time goes by, maybe by episode 30 or 40, it'll be the thing to do. A celebrity'll want to do a voice: "Hey, I want to be a drug addict on 'Spawn'!"

Was there anything you wanted to accomplish in '97 that you didn't get to?

Not really; I don't think there was anything there that we missed. Next year, we'll come out with the "X-Files" toys, since we got the license for the "X-Files" movie. They haven't granted a toy license for the actual TV show, which is too bad because there's some cool characters there we'd like to do. But it's a start, and hopefully we can convince them we're the guys to do it.

We're also looking at getting the Jason [from "Friday the 13th"] and Freddy Krueger [from "A Nightmare on Elm Street"] toys. They're doing a new movie over at New Line where the two of them are going to cross over, and we're trying to finalize the deal to do the toys, because nobody could do them as good as us.

Spawn has a finite power meter running down in the comics. Does Todd McFarlane have a finite power supply, as well? And if so, how's the meter looking?

WANDA [*Still not looking away from her computer screen*]: I like that question.

McFARLANE [*Smiling, he shoots Wanda a "What do YOU know?" kind of glance*]: I think those around me think it's lower than it actually is. I'm actually stronger than people think, mentally and physically. I push myself, but I become like a marathoner. Earlier on, like at the inception of Image, I was more of a sprinter. I think you can go a lot longer than people realize if you learn to let people help you out with certain jobs and you surround yourself with good people. I'm at the point now where I'm really only as good as the people around me.

You've hinted before that retirement might not be too far away for you. Do you think you could quit it all and stay away, or would you have to come back to comic books?

I know one day I could wake up and go, "I'm done," and walk away from it and never come back. But I'd be sitting out front with my kid and see somebody speed down the street, and then I'd go, "Y'know, we need a speed bump!" and I'd be on an unholy quest. I could be 75 years old, but I'm not going in my grave until we get that speed bump. It might not be starting new companies, but I'm psycho, so I know it'd be about something. I'll create adventure to some degree. W

California-based writer Scott Brick claims his articles are his children, and that he absolutely hates putting them to bed.

MAN...OR MONSTER?

Here's what other prominent professionals have to say about the controversial Todd McFarlane.

Paul Schrodt

MARK WAID (*Captain America*)—*"I remember him from when I was his editor on* Infinity, Inc. *He had something special going on even then. He is clearly, in his own way, the smartest man who's ever worked in comics. Whether you like his work or not, you have to respect the fact that he either does it his way or no way at all. He has as much creative integrity as anybody I've ever seen in this industry."*

Paul Schrodt

ALEX ROSS (*Kingdom Come*)—*"This guy busts serious balls by the fact that he's the most popular creator, he has the best-selling book, he owns everything and he makes more money than God. He's at the top of his game, and he can't be manipulated by anybody."*

Paul Schrodt

ERIK LARSEN (*Savage Dragon*)—*"I've known him since he lived in a crappy little apartment in Vancouver; I'm his oldest and dearest friend* [Laughter]. *He hasn't changed a bit; success hasn't spoiled him, he's always pretty much been spoiled. I think Todd's great; I enjoy him a lot. He's the closest friend I've got at Image, and if he goes, I go."*

Courtesy of J. Scott Campbell

J. SCOTT CAMPBELL (*Gen13*)—*"I've always been a great admirer of his work. He has such a great flair for making comic books exciting, a hit-you-between-the-eyes kind of style. He has the ability to make every single shot exciting, and I really admire that."*

Al Ortega

DAVID WOHL (*Witchblade*)—*"The first time I met Todd, I was playing alongside him at a softball game in San Diego. All I kept thinking, enviously, was, 'Wow, all that talent and he's a friggin' good outfielder, too.'"*

ROB LIEFELD (*Fighting American*)—*"His talents even outreach his ambitions. That may sound funny coming from me, because in the last year or so, he's taken a lot of shots at me in the press, and it's confusing to me. I probably will always remember the 10 or 11 years that Todd and I were really good friends, but people grow apart. I think he's one of the more interesting people to watch in the industry. I would hate to be in a comic industry that didn't have Todd McFarlane, that's for darn sure. I honestly don't think Todd and I will be close again—[although] things change—but he's got a great machine that's operating very nicely. You can't argue with his success."* ■ SB

Al Ortega

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1998 PREVIEW

A sneak peek at the storylines of 1998's hottest books

By Matthew Brady

WE KNOW YOUR TYPE.

You're not happy unless you read the last page of a book first. You bug out when your favorite comic's "next issue box" tells you squat. Heck, you'd give your left kidney to find out when Wolverine's getting his adamantium back. Well, fanboy—today's your lucky day.

We tracked down the creators of today's hottest books and slapped them silly until they cracked and spilled the beans on what's coming up in 1998—characters die and change, powers shift and a well-known city gets ripped apart. And that's just for starters! Wanna know more? Save your kidney, and just read on. We've already done the research.

AQUAMAN

CREATIVE TEAM: Peter David, Jim Calafiore and Peter Palmiotti

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Having been re-crowned as King of Atlantis, Aquaman's life hasn't been a bowl of cherries lately. He's had to deal with the Gamesman, Parademons, gaining the powers of a near-god, temporarily losing his eyesight, opening up Poseidonis to tourism, Dr. Polaris, Mera's return and the fact that his main squeeze Dolphin has left him for his former sidekick Tempest.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Aquaman starts spending more time away from Poseidonis, opening the throne up to a three-way power struggle between Koryak, Dolphin and Deep Blue. While he's out and about, Aquaman gets caught up in a battle between Poseidon and Triton, inadvertently allying himself with the loser, Poseidon. Also, Aquaman plays a major role in the Super-books' "Millennium Giants" crossover starting with issue #43, when one of Atlantis' cities is destroyed by the returning giants.

DOWN THE ROAD: Charybdis, the guy who caused Aquaman to lose his hand, returns and kidnaps Earth's water elemental Naiad, intent on flooding the surface world and blaming it on Aquaman. To his horror, Aquaman realizes he needs the aid of two people: Poseidon (who may be beyond help after his battle with Triton), and his former wife and one-time enemy, Mera.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: No "Aquaman Month" is in the works just yet, but DC is in the midst of expanding its statue line, and the angry Atlantean may just show up in porcelain with gold trim sooner than you think.

ASTRO CITY

CREATIVE TEAM: Kurt Busiek, Brent Anderson and Will Blyberg

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Altar Boy was taken in as a sidekick by the vampiric Confessor, who ultimately sacrificed himself to save Astro City from an alien invasion. Following the Confessor's death, Altar Boy assumed the guise of his mentor. Afterwards, Jack-in-the-Box was forced to take a hard look at himself when his descendants returned from the future and gave him a dire warning.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: *Astro City* #13 tells the tale of Looney Leo, a cartoon lion who's been living in Astro City for more than 40 years. Issue #14 kicks off the six-part Steel Jack storyline which follows the adventures of a former villain trying to reform his life. Problem is, he's publicly known and made of stainless steel from head-to-toe.

DOWN THE ROAD: The second half of '98 will start off with some one-shot stories and at least one more multi-part arc. It'll either feature Beauty or the story Busiek originally planned for *Marvels II*, explaining what went wrong in the '70s for Astro's heroes, including what happened to Silver Agent.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Busiek is still tossing around ideas for some cool Astro City merchandise. If you're lucky, besides refrigerator magnets and T-shirts, 1998 will see a Samaritan statue and an Astro City snow globe.

AVENGERS

CREATIVE TEAM: Kurt Busiek, George Pérez and Al Vey

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Having defended the "Heroes Reborn" Earth from Galactus and survived a merge with the WildStorm Universe, the Avengers found themselves back in the Marvel Universe. There, Earth's Mightiest Heroes were collected by Franklin Richards to save the Earth from the Celestials. The Celestials' threat averted, the members pulled together to reform the team.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Faced with a threat that only the Avengers can defeat, the team returns with a membership drive in issues #1-#3. The new team will be set by #4, and will include a member who's never been an Avenger before, and originally appeared outside the regular Marvel Universe. Issues #5-#6 will be the team's baptism by fire in a battle with the Squadron Supreme, which was last seen hanging out in Project Pegasus.

DOWN THE ROAD: At least one new character is on the horizon, along with the return of villains Moses Magnum, the Grim Reaper and Ultron, as well as Franklin Richards' former babysitter/witch Agatha Harkness. The membership will also go through some changes in the first year as the dead are raised, and one of the members gets put into intensive care. Also, we'll find out why those Avengers who survived Onslaught didn't reform the team immediately after the catastrophic event.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Why the Squadron Supreme? The answer lies over 10 years ago when a young artist began penciling *The Avengers* with a story that pitted them against a certain superpowered group. The group? Squadron Supreme. The penciler? George Pérez. Welcome back, George!

BATMAN

CREATIVE TEAMS: Chuck Dixon, Graham Nolan and Bob McLeod (*Detective Comics*); Doug Moench, Kelley Jones and John Beatty (*Batman*); Alan Grant, Mark Buckingham and Wayne Faucher (*Batman: Shadow of the Bat*)

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Gotham's been pretty busy lately. In *Batman*, Bats faced the Demon, Joker, Penguin, Clayface and Ragman; he went up against Gearhead, Firefly, and even managed to take down a couple of bad dudes down as Bruce Wayne in *Detective*. Meanwhile, over in *Shadow*, the Dark Knight's dealt with Commissioner Gordon being unjustly thrown into jail, being wanted by the GCPD and teaming up with Fate.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: There's a whole lotta shakin' going on! Gotham will be hit by an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, which nearly wipes the city out. All the continuity Batman books, plus a few specials will tie in to the two-month event, as the entire Bat-family helps rescue survivors and tracks down the madman behind it all. After the quake, Man-Bat will rear his ugly head, along with Azrael, Mr. Freeze, Green Arrow and nearly all of DC's martial artists.

DOWN THE ROAD: Ramifications of the quake will be felt for a year, and may lead to a facelift for Gotham. As for the main story, rumors are flying that a big change is on the way for Batman, something that could affect the books for the rest of the year. Stay tuned for details.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Look for a ton of Bat-specials in '98, including the conclusion of the "Red Rain" trilogy, *Batman: The Scottish Connection*, *Gordon of Gotham* and a Ra's Al Ghul/Bane special.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

CREATIVE TEAM: Mark Waid, Ron Garney and Bob Wiacek

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: His stint as a newly rebooted S.H.I.E.L.D. agent in the "Heroes Reborn" universe completed, Cap traveled throughout that world's America, battling the Sons of the Serpent and joining with other heroes to fight Galactus. Ultimately, Cap and his fellow heroes returned to the regular Marvel Universe after combining forces to face the Celestials.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Coming back to our reality in Japan, Cap has to face life in a world that sees him as even more of an icon than ever. Look for Cap's world to be shattered once again with issue #2, as the Star Spangled Avenger gets dealt a blow he never saw coming. Issue #4 kicks off "Man Out of Time," an arc dealing with Cap's legacy and influence over the years. And who better to help with this storyline than Kang, the time-tripping conqueror?

DOWN THE ROAD: Thanks to his habit of occasionally disappearing, Cap will take some time to look for a replacement (a vice-Cap if you will)—someone to stand in if he should happen to disappear again. Later in the year, look for the triumphant return of the Falcon, Sharon Carter and Batroc the Leaper, as well as a flashback story reuniting WWII's Invaders.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Look for a two-part *S.H.I.E.L.D.* series to spin out of *Captain America* sometime within its first year, revitalizing the organization. But hey, isn't S.H.I.E.L.D. chief Nick Fury dead? Could be, but has anyone seen his body lately?

MATURE
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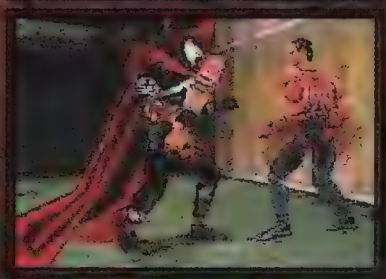

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THE DARKNESS

CREATIVE TEAM: Garth Ennis, Malachy Coney, Marc Silvestri and Batt

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Gifted with the ages-old power of the Darkness, mob hitman Jackie Estacado found himself in the middle of a war between the forces of light and darkness, one intent on controlling him, one on killing him. Now, smack-dab in the middle of a Mafia/Yakuza war, Jackie encountered Sara Pezzini, bearer of the Witchblade, an eons-old weapon designed to destroy the Darkness.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Ennis and Coney pick up the writing chores with issue #11 for the "Hearts of Darkness" storyline introducing Appolonia Franchetti, daughter of Don Frankie, Jackie's boss. The problem with that? Appolonia is out to take over her father's operations at all costs...which includes killing her father's most trusted hitman, Jackie himself. To reach these ends, Appolonia appeals to the eternal enemy of the Darkness: the Angelus.

DOWN THE ROAD: Jackie will continue to deal with his...um...sexual problem (the instant he gets a woman pregnant, he dies), and find some creative solutions in the upcoming year. He'll also continue to deal with the fact that his only true friend, Jenny, is nowhere to be found. Is she lost, or is it something far more sinister?

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Besides the spring debut of the somewhat regular *Tales of the Darkness*, featuring stories about past and future wielders of the Darkness, there's a Darkness sculpture and Darkness snow globe in the works from Moore creations. Look for both to hit comic shops in mid-to-late '98.

DEADPOOL

CREATIVE TEAM: Joe Kelly, Walter McDaniel and Anibal Rodriguez

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Totally screwed up thanks to his involvement with villainess Typhoid Mary, Deadpool went out and totally screwed up his life, alienating all his friends and really ticking off his enemies. In other words, absolutely no one likes him now.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Pulling himself up by his bootstraps, Deadpool will hook up with Landau, Luckman and Lake in an effort to repair the shambles of his life. Look for tie-ins to *Deadpool* #–1 as 'Pool will learn more about the mysterious group that seems to have his life planned out for him.

DOWN THE ROAD: Someone is killing Weapon X project participants, and Deadpool happens to be on the list. This fact will lead Deadpool to track down his old buds, and learn lots more about his own origin, which'll be shown in the '98 *Deadpool Annual*. Look for the truth about Deadpool's friend Blind Alfred and an Alpha Flight guest appearance as well.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Ready for a Deadpool party? Just wait until October for "Deadpool Month," when Marvel will release two Deadpool-related specials and four Deadpool trade paperbacks reprinting the entire first year of stories, as well as the '97 annual. Also, Laser Mach, the company that makes the laser-etched metal sculptures is itching to do a miniature Deadpool, so keep your eyes peeled.

FANTASTIC FOUR

CREATIVE TEAM: Scott Lobdell, Alan Davis and Mark Farmer

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: The Fantastic Four joined the other "Heroes Reborn" heroes in a struggle against the planet-eating Galactus, a battle ended by the Silver Surfer's ultimate sacrifice. Following this, the FF were instrumental in the heroes' return to the Marvel Universe, thanks to the powers of the Richards' son, Franklin.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: The fun starts early when the Red Ghost and his Super Apes show up in Times Square for New Year's Eve, intent on releasing a virus into the crowd. Meanwhile, the FF, along with the newly returned Alicia Masters and Silver Surfer, find themselves smack in the middle of a civil war between Mole Man's Moloids. Next up, the Crucible debuts, intent on making life miserable for the FF. And speaking of miserable, plenty of other developments start to come to a head, including serious medical developments for Sue.

DOWN THE ROAD: In the second half of '98, the FF will find that someone has stolen Namor's sea monster-summoning horn, the Negative Man will engage the entire FF in a whopper of a battle and the team finds itself in a race with the Crucible to find Reed Richards' incredible cache of advanced technology. Meanwhile, the Wizard has been on a recruitment drive, building a new Frightful Four—this time, a team *worthy* of the name.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Keep your eyes on this book for some upcoming creative changes. Davis is strongly rumored to be departing after issue #3, with Salvador Larocca picking up the regular art chores.

FLASH

CREATIVE TEAM: Grant Morrison, Mark Millar, Paul Ryan and John Nyberg

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Following the return of his rogues gallery from the dead, Wally West and friends took on the Suit, and in the battle, Wally broke both his legs. Mysteriously, the Speed Force has come to his aid, but there appears to be a sinister twist to it.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Issue #134 spotlights Jay Garrick while Wally's busy healing. The story unfolds as Garrick, the Golden Age Flash, travels throughout the DCU looking for the Thinker's Thinking Cap so his old enemy can save himself from rapidly progressing cancer. *Flash* #135 wraps up the Green Arrow/Green Lantern/Flash crossover, just in time for the three-part "Human Race," starting in #136. The race pits Wally against an alien, who turns out to be his imaginary childhood friend. The winner's world lives, the loser's world dies.

DOWN THE ROAD: Morrison and Millar wrap up their tenure on *Flash* with the Black Flash saga. Seems that part of the Speed Force was corrupted when Savatar entered it back in #100. Following the Black Flash, Mark Waid and Brian Augystyn return for the ultimate Flash story in *Flash* #142—"Chain Lightning," pitting the speedster against his greatest challenge yet. And with Wally's imminent demise somewhere on the horizon (as hinted in *Flash Secret Files* #1), it just may be his last.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Looking to expand its statue line, DC may be adding the Scarlet Speedster to its line-up. And with the success of this year's Legion flight rings, a Flash ring is far from out of the question.

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GEN 13

CREATIVE TEAM: John Arcudi, Gary Frank and Cam Smith

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: In a harrowing escape from Internal Operations pursuers, half the team got sent into space and teamed up with a misfit band of aliens. In escaping the savage alien Brahn, the team got sent into the future where the Earth existed as a Gen-archy and Lynch ruled with an iron fist. Escaping the dystopian future, the kids returned home, but concerns about the future remain.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: New writer John Arcudi jumps on with issue #26, and keeps the team on the run from I/O. The gang will wrap up some unfinished business in Southern Calif., and head to New York, where they'll find that Ivana Baiul, leader of DV8, still has some unresolved issues with them. She still considers them hers, and she wants them back—or dead.

DOWN THE ROAD: Look for stories that will focus on Freefall, Burnout and Rainmaker in the near future, along with a new villain or two. However, plans for additions to the team are on hold for a while. Also, thanks to growing distrust between one member and Lynch, someone may be leaving the team for a short period of time.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: The Gen^{13} straight-to-video animated movie is complete and ready to ship, according to WildStorm's VP of Marketing Jeff Mariotte. Plans call for Disney to distribute the film sometime in early-to-mid '98. Also, the Gen^{13} video game has unfortunately been put on hiatus and won't be hitting your game systems anytime in the near future.

GREEN LANTERN

CREATIVE TEAM: Ron Marz, Darryl Banks and Terry Austin

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Following his return from California, Kyle's life has been shaken up as his girlfriend Donna left, he teamed up with Green Arrow against racists and joined forces with Superboy to take on a Hawaiian goddess. If that weren't enough, Deadman showed up and took control of his body to help rescue his roommate Jade.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: *Green Lantern* #95 features Jim Starlin's return to penciling in a story about robots, giant slugs and social responsibility. After that, GL takes a vacation with Green Arrow and the Flash, and the trio bumps into some villains who had the same idea. Look for GL to head to the 30th century for #98-#99 in a story that teams Kyle with the Legion of Super-Heroes and introduces the 30th century Green Lantern Corps. Also, a three issue mini-series will team Sentinel with GL as the two search (once again) for the missing Jade.

DOWN THE ROAD: Issue #100 will feature surprise guest stars, including one that people aren't expecting, and one that people are expecting. (Hmm...Hal Jordan certainly seems to fit that criteria.) After the century mark, GL starts a biweekly shipping schedule through #106. Look for the story to explore the ramifications of events from #100. Also, look for *GL Secret Files* and a GL hardcover with art by Brad Parker coming for May's "Green Lantern Month."

THE INSIDE SCOOP: GL fans better save their pennies for the GL-related merchandise coming in 1998. Things kick off with May's Hal Jordan statue and 1999's Alan Scott statue. And with the success of this year's Legion ring, don't be surprised if you find yourself wearing a Green Lantern ring in '98. (Assuming you've got enough cash, that is.)

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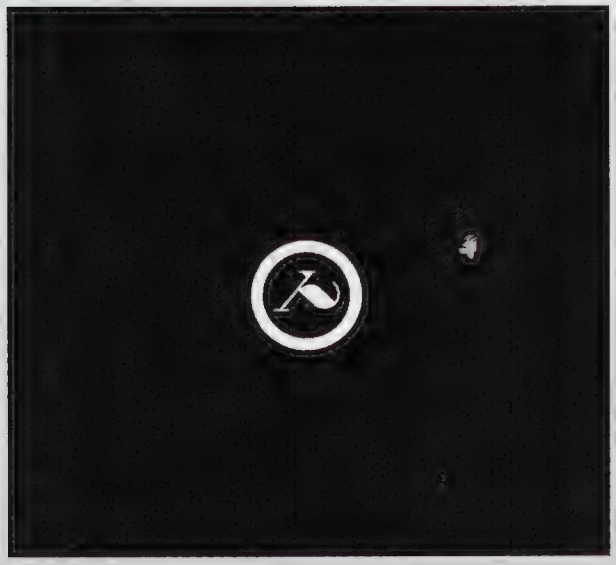

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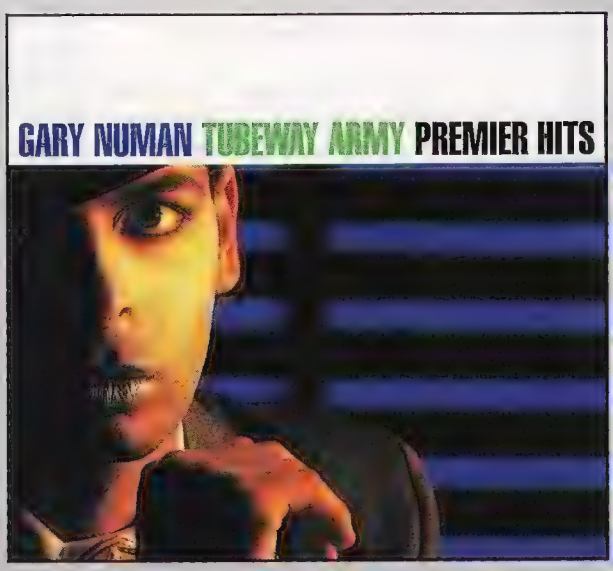

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INCREDIBLE HULK

CREATIVE TEAM: Peter David, Adam Kubert and Mark Farmer

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Since learning that he killed his father, the Hulk has become more unbalanced than ever. He battled the X-Men when they offered to help him, and actually became Apocalypse's horseman War for a while. As he continued to deteriorate, the Hulk took on the Juggernaut, Mr. Hyde and the Abomination, all of which drained him to the point of death. But at the last moment, Bruce Banner showed up.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: After the fatal fallout from "Heroes Return," the Hulk will have to fight his way back to the land of the living. While the Hulk does make his way back, so does his ultimate enemy, the Maestro. The Destroyer shows up as well, to add a little more violence to the proceedings. Luckily, the Hulk finds an unexpected ally in Thunderbolt Ross.

DOWN THE ROAD: Things take an extraterrestrial twist as the truth behind Ross' recent resurrection is revealed: it involves the alien Troygens and their leader, Armageddon. Also, Bruce will begin to adjust to the new status quo, and take a turn for the tougher, while the Hulk—apparently under Bruce's complete control, becomes more compassionate and caring. Don't expect everything to stay at that stage however—everything's set to change when a calamitous event occurs in the Hulk's life as a line is crossed, and Bruce's status quo changes forever.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: If all goes well, the Hulk will hit the big screen in the first half of 1999 in a big-budget feature film from Universal. While the Hulk will be entirely computer generated, Johnny Depp has been in discussion to play Banner.

IRON MAN

CREATIVE TEAM: Kurt Busiek, Sean Chen and Eric J. Cannon

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: In a climactic battle in the "Heroes Reborn" Universe, Tony Stark joined with the other heroes to stop Galactus from devouring the Earth. Stark again teamed with the heroes against the Celestials, a fight that ultimately returned him home to the Marvel Universe.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: After being declared legally alive in issue #1, the adult Tony throws a party with all of New York's celebrities in attendance. Getting back to business in a big way, Tony heads to Switzerland to aid an old friend who's having trouble with a band of hi-tech mercenaries called Death Squad. He then trips down to the Caribbean to debut Stark Enterprises' new web browser, where he's attacked by the new Firebrand, who's out to make a political statement.

DOWN THE ROAD: Tony takes a trip to Australia and meets up with the Black Widow to rescue kidnapped scientists who're being held in the outback. Next, a trip to France pits Tony against the new Whiplash, and our boy starts to realize that there's someone behind all the trouble he's encountered lately. Look for the showdown between Tony and his mystery enemy in #8-#9, a battle that severely damages both sides and leads to a revised armor design for Iron Man.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Series artist Sean Chen, a true technophile at heart, is champing at the bit to draw Iron Man's special effects. "The technology really appeals to me," Chen says. "I love flying guys in armor. There's a lot of really cool things I'm planning to do with his armor and weapons. Keep reading!"

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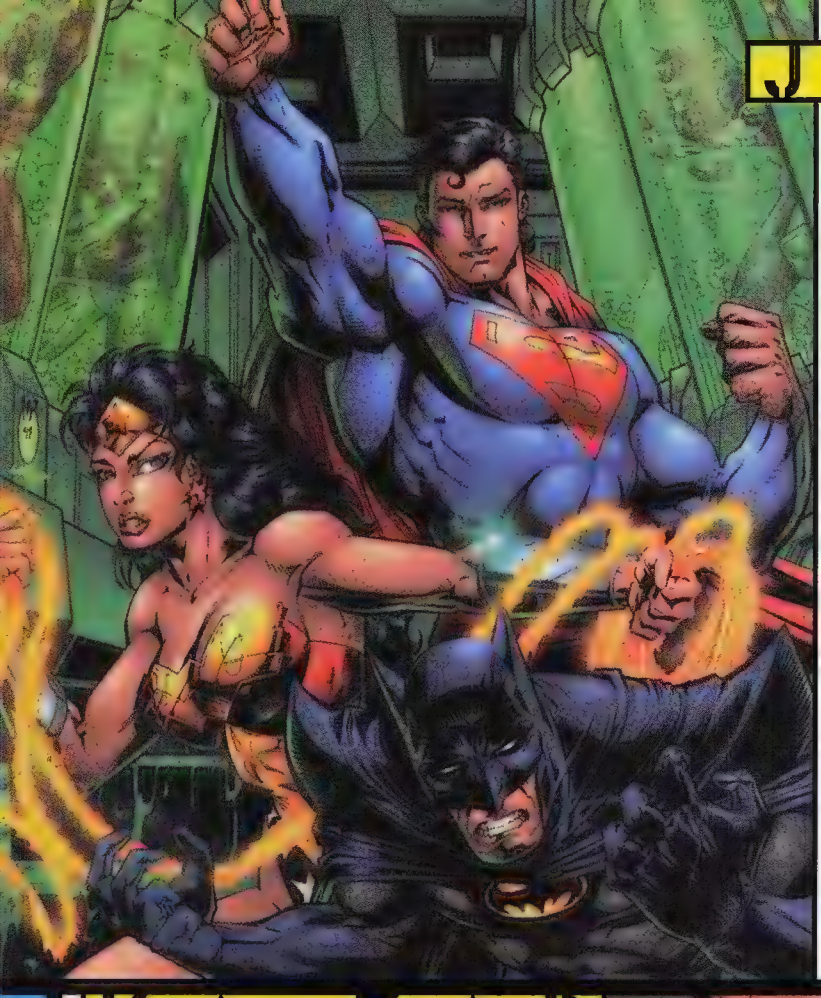

JLA

CREATIVE TEAM: Grant Morrison, Howard Porter and John Dell

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: After defeating the Key, the JLA found itself up against the Injustice Gang—headed by Lex Luthor—which possesses the mystical Heart of Darkness. After defeating the Gang's holographic evil duplicates of the JLA, the JLA inadvertently set plans in motion that allowed Darkseid to conquer the Earth and rule it for 10 years. The only way out? An impossible mission to the past to prevent Darkseid's takeover.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: "Rock of Ages" wraps with the double-sized #15. A two-parter that assembles all 12 team members together follows, and pits the JLA against Prometheus, a villain who's infiltrated the JLA Watchtower, and knows all their weaknesses. Needless to say, he nearly wipes out the team, before they pull out a last minute save. *JLA* #18-#19 will feature a Starro invasion, a follow-up to the story in *JLA Secret Files* showing how the Starro probe was instrumental in the formation of the new team.

DOWN THE ROAD: Following the annual DCU crossover series being prepped by Morrison for this summer, the JLA will team up with the JSA in a story that will introduce a new Johnny Thunder and Thunderbolt. Beyond that, an invasion from the fifth dimension headed by Mr. Mxyzptlk is in the works. As the battle progresses, the JLA will take the fight back to the fifth dimension, and give that little guy a butt whuppin' he won't forget.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Look for a trade paperback reprinting the entire world-shattering "Rock of Ages" storyline from *JLA* #10-#15 in mid '98.

KA-ZAR

CREATIVE TEAM: Mark Waid, Andy Kubert and Jesse Delperdang

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Moving to New York to foil his brother Parnival's plans, Ka-Zar and his wife Shanna have had run-ins with the Rhino and Parnival's shock troops. Meanwhile, Parnival's partner Thanos has engineered the removal of the Savage Land's terraforming machinery (a device that keeps the Savage Land alive), moved it to New York and activated it, turning NYC into a true jungle.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: All questions will be answered in the "Urban Jungle" storyline, including why Parnival teamed with Thanos and what their ultimate goal is. If Ka-Zar can stop Thanos without getting himself killed, he'll have to head home in a hurry, as the Savage Land is starting to get really, really cold. Also, just what the heck was found *under* the terraforming machinery when it was removed from the Savage Land? Expect it to lead to more trouble than Ka-Zar could've ever expected.

DOWN THE ROAD: Hey, when Waid writes both *Captain America* and *Ka-Zar*, can a team-up be far away? Nope. Look for Cap to do some jungle-livin' later in the year, as he and Ka-Zar run afoul of a major threat. Also, Ka-Zar will bump into Marvel's other major jungle hero, the Black Panther later in '98.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Not much Ka-Zar loot on the horizon, but be sure to check out the *Ka-Zar '98 Annual* which promises a team-up between Ka-Zar with Daredevil, and will tie into subplots that were introduced in Ka-Zar's first year.

(Frame) Collection of cover reproductions from ***Avengers #1***.
Pencil and ink art by George Pérez and Al Vey.
Inspired by 48-page premiere issue written by Kurt Busiek. (December 17, 1997)

(Interior) Art reproduction from ***Iron Man #1***.
Pencil and ink art by Sean Chen and Eric J. Cannon.
Inspired by 48-page premiere issue written by Kurt Busiek. (December 10, 1997)

MARVEL

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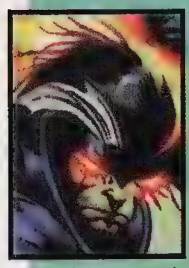
ALSO IN '98

ALPHA FLIGHT

Issue #7 takes a look inside Dept. H and exposes some dark secrets, including a new threat headed by someone named Trask. Continuing the exposé theme, issue #8 looks into the Weapon X program, but whose version of events should you trust: The government's or Mac and Heather's? The X-Men show up in issue #9, tying in to *Uncanny X-Men* #355. Also, expect a couple of returning Alpha members as the book heads toward #12, which will wrap up ongoing storylines including Sunfire's advanced state of radiation poisoning.

ASCENSION

Caught up in the war between the Dayaks and Mineans, Andromeda and Lucien slowly learn more about the changes that they've gone through and the extent of their new powers. To their dismay, Andromeda and Lucien's old boss Gregorieff thinks he's the new messiah, and it's his mission to kill the duo.

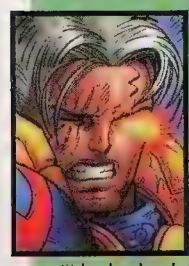


ASH

The current storyline, "Fire and Crossfire" concludes with #5, during which Ashley is forced to question his motivations after his mother is injured. Also, besides meeting the new villain Toothpick, you'll learn the Comedian's origin, and see that he's a little more complicated than everyone thought.

BONE

Look for Thorn, Smiley and Fone Bone to start a quest, just as Phoney is captured by the rat creatures. Meanwhile, Lucius discovers the town is destroyed, and things gear up for a major crisis coming by the end of the year. Also, Stan Sakai (*Usagi Yojimbo*) writes and pencils a five-part backup story from #31-#35, focusing on the rat creatures.



CABLE

New writer Joe Casey picks up the writing chores with #51, which continues the Hellfire Hunt, where Cable has to prevent the Hellfire Club from killing Apocalypse. Following the Hunt's conclusion in #53, Cable will end up stranded in Wakanda, where he'll run into Klaw, the Black Panther and a buncha animals.

PREACHER

CREATIVE TEAM: Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: After laying low in New York for a while, Jesse and company hit New Orleans, looking for a way for Jesse to access the knowledge of Genesis that's trapped inside his head. While in the Big Easy, the gang ran into *Les Enfants Du Sang* (The Children of Blood), old buds of Cassidy's who all want Cass to turn them into real vampires.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Issue #34 kicks off a the four-part "Fire Under the Sun" arc that gathers Jesse, Tulip, Cassidy, Starr and the Saint of Killers in Monument Valley for a big, big, *big* battle including guns, tanks, guns, bombs and guns.

DOWN THE ROAD: Look for the dynamic between Cass, Jesse and Tulip to change as stories kick into high gear following "Fire Under the Sun." Upcoming stories will focus more on Jesse, as his personal quest for God intensifies, thanks to what he learned in New Orleans.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Look for a one-shot telling Starr's story, a Tulip special and one trade paperback reprinting the first set of Preacher specials as well as the killer *Saint of Killers* mini-series.

SPAWN

CREATIVE TEAM: Todd McFarlane, Greg Capullo and Chance Wolf

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: The turmoil continues as Al Simmons has learned Chapel wasn't responsible for his death, and Hell is secretly after Wanda's soul. In an unexpected turn, Al's face was restored to its human form, something that has driven a wedge between Terry and Al, as Al has sworn to win Wanda back. Also, Al has learned more of the ugly secrets of the alleys, and the Freak has returned to wreak havoc.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Al will learn more about the alleyways in the early part of '98, as well as finding out more about the mythology of the Spawn curse. Also, it will become clear to Al that nothing in his life is random, from his placement in the alleys to his association with Sam and Twitch and how the child killer Billy Kincaid fit into the whole scheme of things.

DOWN THE ROAD: More Mafia is in Al's future, as Tony Twist takes an active interest in what's going on in the alleyways again. Along with seeing organized crime, we'll finally learn how Spawns are connected to vampires anyway, and what the powers of Heaven have been up to since they were last seen a couple of years ago. Finally, May will be "Spawn Month," so look for a new trade paperback, and possibly an annual.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: More animated Spawn is on the way! HBO has ordered 12 more episodes of the adult cartoon, and is most likely set to order six more, bringing the series to a total of 18 episodes. Look for the new episodes to air sometime around February or March on HBO.

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CATWOMAN

Catty continues her criminal ways in Gotham up until the big quake hits. After pitching in to help with quake relief, Catwoman runs afoul of Poison Ivy and the Scarecrow. Also, The Joker comes gunning for Catwoman, thinking she's now Batman's girlfriend. Why's he think that? Well, the future could hold a kiss between Catty and the Dark Knight.

CURSE OF THE SPAWN

Look for *Curse* to tie in closer with *Spawn* in '98, as stories will fill in the blanks of the main series. Upcoming issues include a Tony Twist tale, where Tony finds out the head Mafia boys in Rome aren't too pleased with his latest work (which serves as a tie-in to the first episodes of the animated series as well); a Cy-Gor story and the introduction of a new Spawn from another time period.

DAREDEVIL

Ghost Rider shows up to give DD a hand against Mr. Fear and the serial killer that Fear released from prison. Everything leads to #375, a story that takes place over one week's time, with each chapter drawn by a different artist. Look for Karen's life to change in a big way, and one of the regular cast gets accused of a crime and tossed in the clink.

GENERATION X

The team will visit Paris, where they find themselves in more trouble than ever. Look for a story focusing on Synch and Jubilee's powers to take some unexpected turns in the upcoming year. Also, some non-X Marvel villains will show up, and there may be a big surprise character returning. Wanna hint? Close and open your eyes really fast.

IMPULSE

Continuing the fun in '98, Impulse will stick with one- to two-issue stories focusing on the youngest member of the Flash family. Look for the Trickster to play a recurring role in Bart's life, often tempting him to disobey Max Mercury's lessons. Also, watch for the Chunk to show up, along with a couple more *femme fatales* for Bart, and the discovery that Manchester has its own criminal dynasty.

SPIDER-MAN

CREATIVE TEAMS: Tom DeFalco, various and Bud LaRosa (*Amazing Spider-Man*); Todd Dezago, Mike Wieringo and Richard Case (*Sensational Spider-Man*); Howard Mackie, John Romita Jr. and Scott Hanna (*Peter Parker: Spider-Man*); J.M. DeMatteis, Luke Ross and Dan Green (*Spectacular Spider-Man*)

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: It's been old villains time, as Spidey's had to deal with Norman Osborn's return, the Living Pharaoh, a re-energized Vulture, someone posing as Kraven the Hunter, Doctor Octopus coming back from the dead, the Shocker and Juggernaut, as well as new bad guys like the Black Tarantula, all while trying to go to school, work at the *Daily Bugle* and have a life.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: January kicks off "Spider-Hunt," a four-part crossover between the Spider-books that sees Spidey framed for murder, and hunted by nearly every bounty hunter in the world. Wanting to keep a low profile, Spidey creates four separate new heroic identities to fight crime, each debuting in its own Spidey title. Look for a new Green Goblin to pop up, too.

DOWN THE ROAD: Spidey will re-integrate his personas in late summer, just in time for the attempted assassination of Norman Osborn. Whodunnit? That's what Spidey's gonna find out. If all this sounds stressful, you're right—Peter and MJ's marriage is gonna feel it most of all. Is there a sad development in the works?

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Sadly, don't expect to see Spidey grace the silver screen any time soon. Despite the fact that MGM bought the rights to a Spider-Man film back in March, no progress has been made on it due in part to potential director James Cameron's tight schedule, and recent lackluster comic book movie profits.

SUPERMAN

CREATIVE TEAMS: Stuart Immonen and Jose Marzan Jr. (*Action Comics*); Karl Kesel, Tom Grummett and Denis Rodier (*Adventures of Superman*); Dan Jurgens, Ron Frenz and Josef Rubinstein (*Superman*); Louise Simonson, Jon Bogdanove and Dennis Janke (*Superman: The Man of Steel*); Roger Stern, Paul Ryan and Brett Breeding (*Superman: The Man of Tomorrow*)

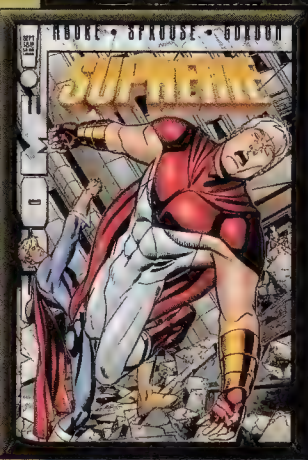
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Following his radical change, Superman has spent the last few months learning about his new powers and appearance, while running into the likes of the Cyborg, the Parasite, Darkseid's minions, Computo and the mysterious Millennium Guard. And if that wasn't enough, Superman's life recently took a bizarre turn when he split into two distinct beings: Superman Red and Superman Blue.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: The two Supermen continue to uneasily patrol Metropolis, each insisting that he's the real deal and the other's the Cyborg. Meanwhile, following Mayor Berkowitz's assassination, newly elected Mayor Sackett proposes to turn Metropolis into a futuristic, utopian city. Also, the Millennium Guard takes its post and awaits the arrival of the Millennium Giants.

DOWN THE ROAD: The Millennium Giants show up, intent on scrubbing the life from this little mudball of ours, kicking off a major, major crossover involving most of the DCU, including Aquaman, the Teen Titans, Challengers of the Unknown and Steel. The two Supermen will play a huge role in stopping the Giants, with serious implications for both of them.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: He's gonna party like it's 1998! For Superman's 60th Anniversary, DC has a jam-packed super-schedule, including three statues: Superman '98, *Kingdom Come* Superman and a bronze Superman. Also, watch out for a ton of specials such as *Superman For All Seasons* (Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale), *Team Superman* and *Superman: Red Son*, along with Super-appearances in *Legends of the DC Universe* and a rumored Alex Ross project.

DO YOU READ THE BOOK EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT?



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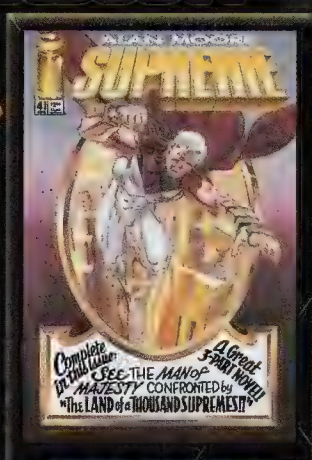

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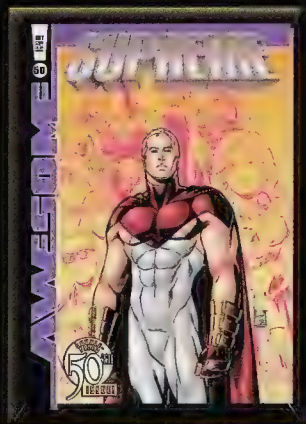
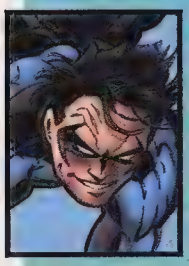


LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES

The time-lost Legion gets back to the future just in time for an invasion of mega proportions. Look for an attempt on the life of a Legion founder, Ferro to consider using 30th century science to cure his deformity, Spark attempting to regain her lightning powers and a schism in the United Planets.

NIGHTWING



Nightwing kicks off the new year fighting Deathstroke for the life of Man-Bat, and helping after the Gotham quake, including rescuing Alfred from a crumbling Wayne Manor. After the quake, Nightwing heads back to Blüdhaven, where Tad has become an impromptu superhero and Amygdala has moved in to the apartment above him. Sheesh.

QUANTUM AND WOODY

The duo's origin story gets wrapped up, just in time for the two to be switched back to their own bodies. Magnum, the dude that Quantum and Woody accidentally arrested shows up, and it really hits the fan. Magnum was none too pleased at being arrested, and he's out to settle the score with Quantum and Woody. Also, expect the first year's subplots to be wrapped up by around issue #15.

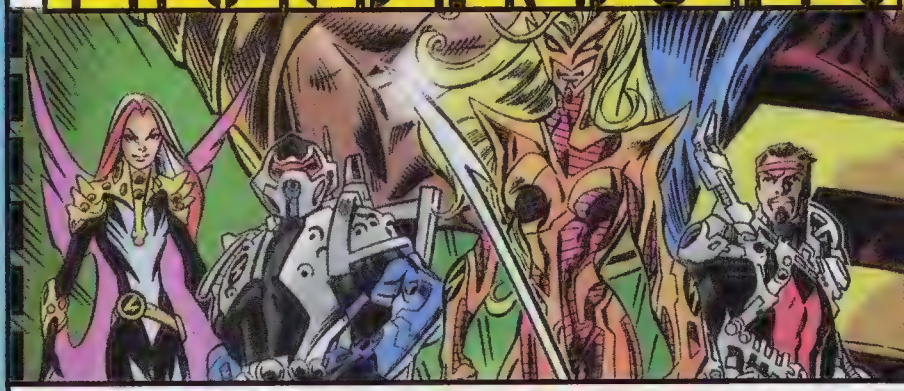
ROBIN

Heading off to Europe with #50, Tim meets up with Lady Shiva, King Snake and a new teenage martial artist, Dava. In a stroke of bad timing, Tim gets back to Gotham just after the big quake. Following the quake storyline, look for stories about Tim's private life, including a junior high criminal and the meanest bully this side of Crime Alley. Also, Tim will meet up with Man-Bat and his batty son in a two-part story.

SAVAGE DRAGON

The Dragon continues to run with his new team in the first part of '98, after being dumped from the Chicago PD. Things are going to get rough for She-Dragon as she finds out the hard way that filling in for Dragon is no easy task, especially considering the freaks Dragon used to dust on a regular basis. Look for a setup to a battle of epic proportions coming up around mid-year as well.

THUNDERBOLTS



CREATIVE TEAM: Kurt Busiek, Mark Bagley and Vince Russell

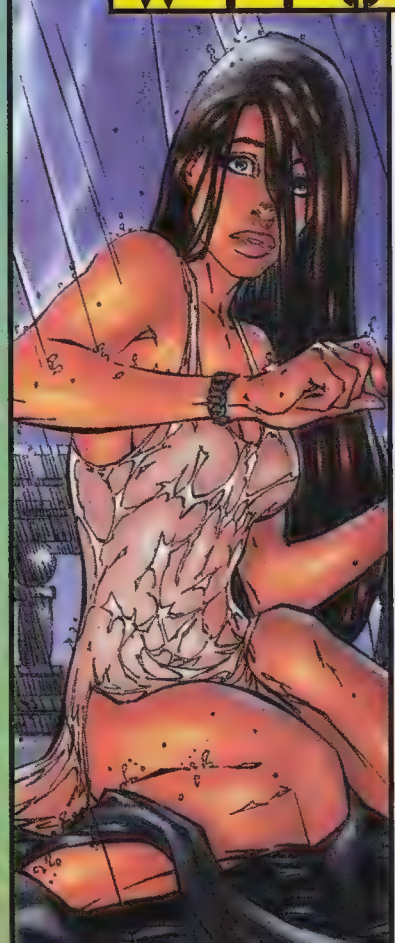
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Disguised as heroes, the Masters of Evil continue to fool the Marvel Universe, gaining everyone's support from S.H.I.E.L.D. to New York's mayor. Fully adapting to their new roles, the team has battled the new Masters of Evil, the Growing Man and the Elements of Doom. Also, Baron Zemo, disguised as Citizen V, has grown concerned that the team members enjoy playing heroes a little too much, and is determined to set them straight (or...uh...crooked in this case).

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Everything changes with issue #12, as a major revelation sends the team off in a whole new direction, and off of Earth for a couple of issues. Their "vacation" gives them time to figure out what direction the team should move in, and when they return to Earth, the 'Bolts travel around the United States, encountering plenty of supervillains on the way. The team's due for some membership changes and guest appearances, including the least-expected Marvel character of all.

DOWN THE ROAD: Rematches abound, including grudge matches with the new Masters of Evil, the Wrecking Crew, Heroes for Hire and possibly the Hulk. Everything leads up to #18, which sends the team off in yet another direction. Throughout the year, storylines in both the *Avengers* and *Thunderbolts* build to at least two meetings between the teams.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Busiek reports the surprise ending of #1 (where the Thunderbolts were revealed as the Masters of Evil), will pale in comparison to issues #12 and #18. Also, *Thunderbolts Annual* #2 will investigate the background of the real Citizen V, and the possibility that he just might've had kids who suspect the truth about the current Citizen V.

WITCHBLADE



CREATIVE TEAM: David Wohl, Christina Z., Michael Turner and D-Tron

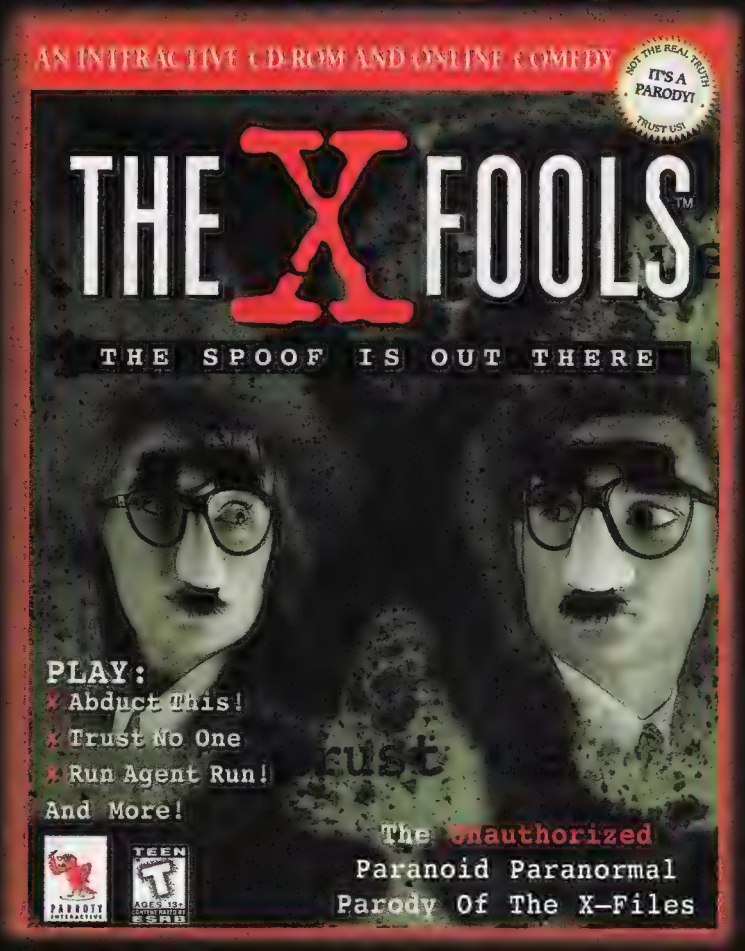
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Suspended from the NYPD, Sara Pezzini, wearer of the Witchblade gauntlet, accepted the offer of Level 42 (a secret government agency) to travel to Brazil for a rescue mission that went bad, placing Sara in a life-and-death battle which she ultimately won. Back home, Sara found herself embroiled in a mob war between the Mafia and the Yakuza—a war that included the Darkness, the Witchblade's mortal enemy.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: Following the shocking conclusion of the "Family Ties" crossover with the Darkness, Sara must readjust to life with the enigmatic Ian Nottingham in the picture, something that doesn't sit too well with her friend Jake. Also, new groups arise looking for power, and the First Church of Holy Prosperity somehow fits into it all.

DOWN THE ROAD: Sara will learn that there's more she doesn't know about her father's death, including Joe Siry's apparent involvement, a revelation that will cause things to heat up around the precinct house. Look for a *Tales of the Witchblade* in late summer written and penciled by Michael Turner, as well as a Witchblade/Tomb Raider comic (with story and art by Turner) to coincide with the release of the *Tomb Raider II* video game.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Now you can have Sara in the palm of your hand. Moore Action Collectibles has inked a deal with Top Cow to produce Witchblade action figures. Look for the first assortment of four (Sara, Mary Bonny Witchblade, Ian Nottingham and Medieval Witchblade) to hit stores late this spring, with the second assortment coming later in '98.

ABDUCT THIS!



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STARMAN

Jack Knight wraps up his adventure with Captain Marvel just in time for a "Times Past" story showcasing Ted Knight and the Demon. Following that, look for a Shade/Matt O'Dare team-up, as Jack gets ready to head into space, which will bring him in contact with the JLA. Jack's space voyage will have ramifications for the DCU, and feature a tie-in to *Kingdom Come*.

STRANGERS IN PARADISE

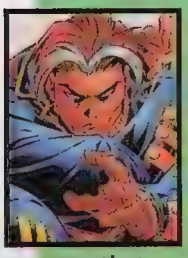
After years of keeping a low profile, Katchoo will finally go back to work, and readers will get a chance to see exactly what her job is anyway. Also, the cast will expand a bit as more friends and enemies come into the picture.

X-FACTOR

The book shifts emphasis in '98, focusing on Bishop's sister Shard and her fellow XSE buds, Archer, Fixx and Greystone, whose spirits have taken up residence within three bodies in the present. For all intents and purposes, the four will be the X-Factor team, occasionally receiving aid from the likes of Mystique and Havok. Their mission? Make sure their dark future doesn't happen. The problem? Figuring out what exactly caused their future to come to pass in the first place.

X-FORCE

Events build up to #75, where the guys and gals take part in the spiritual Burning Man Festival, and experience a consciousness-expanding experience. Look for Cannonball, Cable, Domino, Selene and Reignfire to make appearances as well. Down the road, the heroes will settle in San Francisco, and have to find jobs.



X-MAN

Can a mutant become *too* popular? The answer for Nate is yes, as his work in New York City's Washington Square Park has drawn too much attention his way, forcing him to assume a secret identity complete with a costume and direction change for the series. Later in '98, look for a major dramatic turn in Nate's life that may tie-in with the X-Men's 35th Anniversary. ■ *MB*

WOLVERINE

CREATIVE TEAM: Warren Ellis, Leinil Francis Yu and Edgar Tadeo

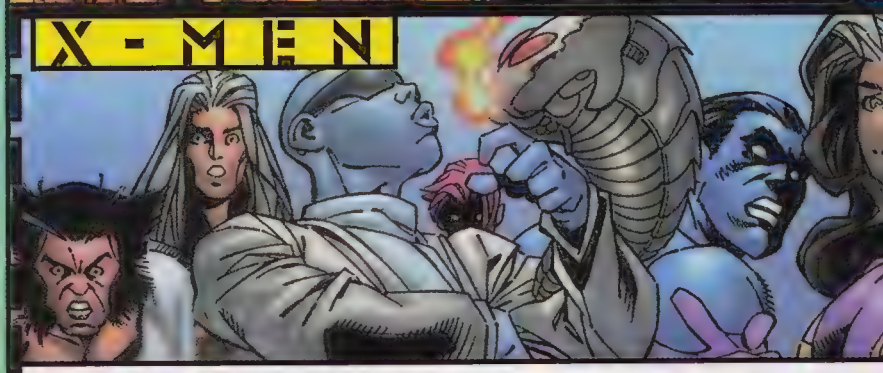
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: After being captured and held in the New Mexico desert, Wolvie was instrumental in helping the X-Men escape from Operation: Zero Tolerance and was finally reunited with Jubilee, who'd been Bastion's prisoner for months. Following this, Wolvie found himself hunted by a man from his past who he knew to be dead.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: The current "Not Dead Yet" storyline continues through #122, pitting Wolvie against the former White Ghost, an assassin Wolverine thought he killed over a decade ago. This guy's had 10 years to plan how to kill an adamantium-laced Wolverine. The bad news? Wolverine doesn't have the adamantium anymore, making him that much easier to kill. Don't look for Wolvie to get outta this one unscathed.

DOWN THE ROAD: At press time, the writing chores past #122 are still up in the air, but editor Mark Powers guarantees that the old Canucklehead will definitely be getting his adamantium back in '98. Look for the metal-mutant reunion to either be part of *Wolverine* #125 or part of the X-Men's 35th Anniversary in late summer.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: Checked out the art on this book lately? Yu and Tadeo (collectively known as Starfire Visuals) are generating buzz that this book hasn't seen in a real long while.

X-MEN



CREATIVE TEAMS: Steven T. Seagle and Chris Bachalo (*Uncanny X-Men*); Joe Kelly, Carlos Pacheco and Art Thibert (*X-Men*)

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Hunted almost to death, the X-Men spent the better part of '97 on the run from Bastion and his Zero Tolerance program aimed at capturing all mutants. Finally free from Bastion's dogged pursuit, the X-Men returned to an empty mansion with a team in shambles, three new members and the revelation that their deadliest foe, Magneto, has returned.

WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN: In *X-Men*, things will focus on the new members for a while, as Scott and Jean take some time off from the teams. The remaining team will find trouble in Salem Center when a murder is committed, and Maggott looks like the culprit. In *Uncanny*, look for a focus on Rogue, along with the return of an X-Men villain who hasn't seen the team in a long time.

DOWN THE ROAD: Long-term *X-Men* plans call for a trip to Africa, where Storm must face up to a tribal obligation and an adventure that will have major implications for the Marvel Universe. In *Uncanny*, Angel and Psylocke's relationship continues to develop as Psylocke takes a darker and stranger turn, and look for a reunion of one of the X-Men incarnations to re-evaluate Professor X's original dream for the team. And hey, something's definitely going on in space between Deathbird and Bishop.

THE INSIDE SCOOP: The cajun thief Gambit will remain away from the team for a few issues, and Wolverine is going to come to blows with new X-woman Marrow. With the 35th Anniversary of the X-Men hitting in '98, look for plenty of groovy special projects and special issues to show up in late summer, as well as both *X-Men* and *Uncanny* to build up to major stories for each book's 35th Anniversary issue.

North Carolina-based freelancer Matthew Brady puts the "in" in information.

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BEST OF THE BEST

'Wizard' picks the finest 1997 had to offer... and what to look for in '98

Best Comic Book Series

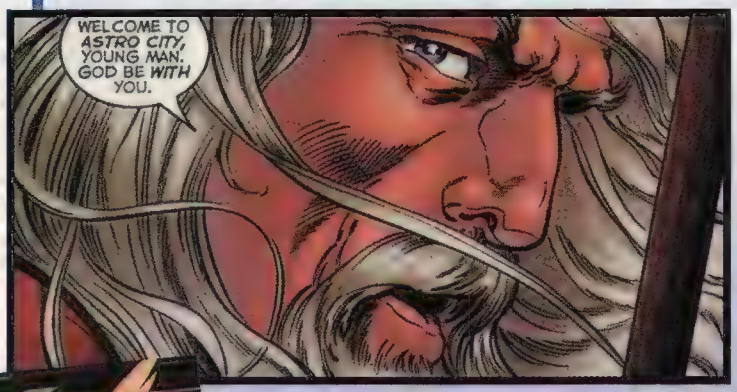
ASTRO CITY

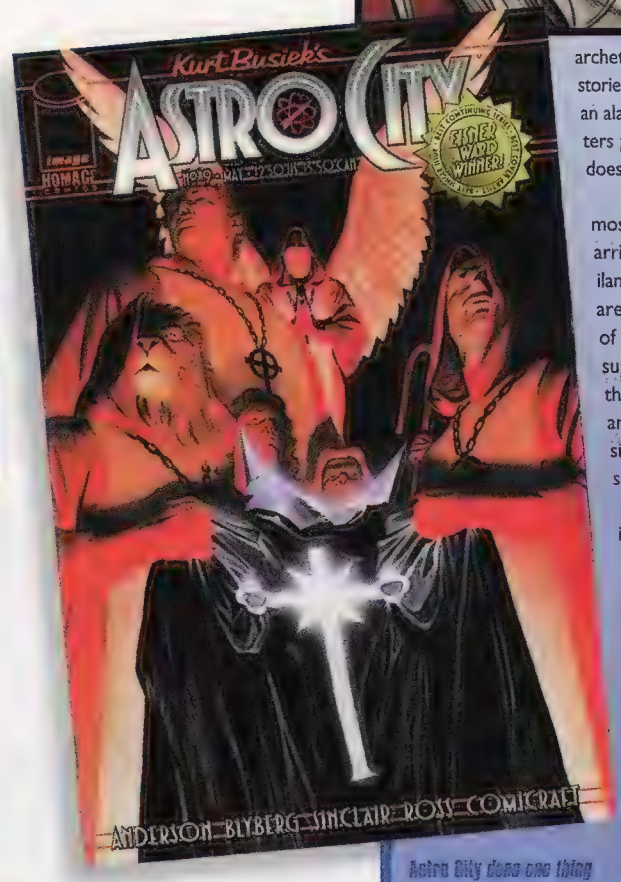
IMAGINE THIS: A WORLD WHERE THE HERO STAYS DEAD, aliens take over the world's government and a villain gets away with the crime of the century. Stop imagining and welcome to the world of *Astro City*.

And there's not a world that's more inviting, simply because *Astro City* does one thing better than any other comic today: it takes familiar concepts and characters and makes them new again.

"*Astro City*'s strength lies in [writer] Kurt Busiek's point of view and how these superheroes remind you of other guys, but are completely new," says *Ash* creator Joe Quesada. "I actually go to the stores every Wednesday and pick up *Astro City* because of its richness."

Busiek and artist Brent Anderson do an excellent job of bringing the traditional superhero point of view to the street level. The superheroes themselves are well-known





Astro City does one thing better than any other comic: takes familiar concepts and makes 'em new again.

archetypes, but with neat twists. And though the setup of Busiek's stories appears to be something we've all read before, he often pulls an alarming U-turn by drastically altering or killing major characters *for keeps*. A lot of the time, *Astro City* is so good at what it does that readers won't notice or care that things look familiar.

But readers will care about what happens in the book mostly due to its street-level storytelling. When a newcomer arrives in *Astro City* in issue #4 and sees a live costumed vigilante for the first time—he's shocked, but since superheroes are common in this world, he then smiles because the sight of the hero is both awe-inspiring and reassuring. When a supernatural serial killer is loose throughout issues #4-#9, the book conveys the fear of Astro City's citizens through an argument at a bar, a demonstrating crowd or discussion at a family's dinner table. *Astro City* makes it a point to show an everyman's perspective in each issue.

As for familiar concepts like vigilante, sidekick and alien invasion stories with a twist of originality, *Astro City* #4-#9 manages to tie 'em all together in one kick-ass story. Readers are thrust into the thick of things, learning Superheroism 101 right alongside its narrator, teenager Brian Kinney.

Brian comes to Astro City to become a superhero, and quickly discovers it ain't all it's chalked up to be. Arriving at the worst time, an unsolved wave of serial killings has the public running scared, heroes are going bad and the mayor's outlawing all heroes from the city because of it. But it doesn't deter Brian, who finds a mysterious mentor, the spooky vigilante Confessor, and a superhero identity: Altar Boy.

But, like Brian, the reader learns a lot. The "bad heroes" are aliens disguised as heroes to discredit them. The Confessor is a bloodsucking vampire. And the mayor is another alien impostor leading an

by The *Wizard* staff

invasion to ravage Earth. What makes the story even cooler is that subtle hints had been placed along the way.

And that's not all readers can pick up on in this series. Think everything's been done with superhero concepts? *Astro City* defies the notion. On the surface, the vigilante Confessor looks like your average Batman knock-off with a religious bent, but the twist is that Confessor's a vampire priest atoning for a past sin that made him become a bloodsucker. The villain Junkman (#10) looks like your regular petty thief like The Riddler or Electro, but unlike those rogues, he pulls off the largest bank robbery in history and *gets away with it clean*.

"I love the way that, in a short period of time and with limited information, you grow to care about these characters like you've cared about them since childhood," says *X-Men* writer Joe Kelly. "And I like the unpredictability of the series."

And that's another reason why *Astro City* rules. It can do what a Marvel or DC comic can't: take *real* chances with its major characters. A hero like Confessor can be built up as invincible only to die a shocking death. Others, like the techno-mercenary Mordecai Chalk, can be beaten to a pulp or disappear to suit a particular storyline. A reader never knows what will happen to his favorite characters next, making deadly situations all the more tense.

Simply put, *Astro City* is a unique comic book and deserves big-time recognition. Just when we tire of seeing retread storylines and unoriginal characters that many comic series sputter out, *Astro City* not only embraces the unoriginal, but shows us what can *really* be done with it.

Image co-founder Jim Lee sums it up best: "You sit down, read it and you know at the end you'll have that warm fuzzy feeling. If you're an older fan, it takes you back to what comics used to be like when you were younger. If you're a new fan, it shows you what can be accomplished when a writer and an artist are in sync with each other and really care about their work. It's a nourishing meal, not a Twinkie comic."

1998's COMIC BOOK SERIES TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

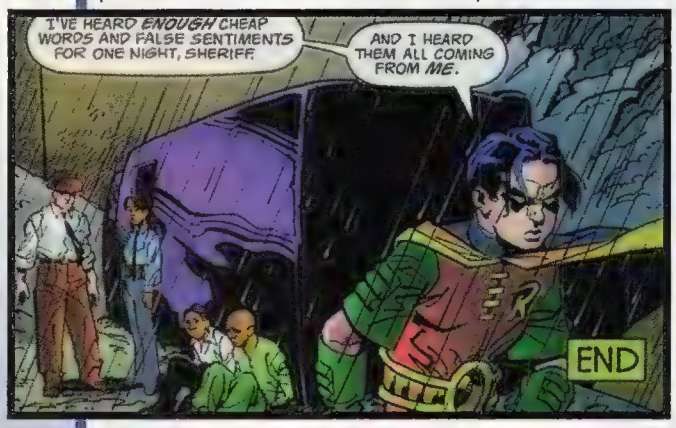
AVENGERS

You can't go wrong with the combination of Kurt Busiek, artist George Perez and Marvel's greatest superheroes. If you think you've already read the greatest Avengers tales, we're betting you ain't seen nothing yet.

Best Hero ROBIN

NO, HE'S NOT PART OF "HEROES RETURN." He's not sporting a brand-new costume or electrical powers. Heck, he's not even drawn by Jim Lee. He's Robin, the Boy Wonder. You know, Batman's "sidekick."

So why's a 14-year-old tag-along our pick for Best Hero? Simple. He's not a mere sidekick, he's Batman's *partner* who works



just as well (if not better) as a solo act. Since his monthly series began, he's quickly becoming the classic Spider-Man of the '90s: an honest everyguy who you'd wanna hang out with. And like the Spidey of old, he's got problems that come with being a teenage superhero. Lots of 'em. A girlfriend he's forbidden to see. Parents who don't understand. Keeping a secret identity. You name it.

Problem: Living in the adult world of Batman and Alfred, Tim doesn't have anyone his age to talk to about all his problems. He can't tell any of his friends about his troubles as Robin, 'cause it'd blow his and Batman's secret identity. And, as Robin, the only one he can turn to for that is the flamboyant Spoiler, a girl his age. But since she's only doing superheroics to impress him, he kinda wants her to quit the hero biz for her own safety.

Problem: His girlfriend Ariana is out of the picture. When she surprises him by showing up in a sexy teddy, being the

1998's HERO TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Returning to the Marvel Universe after a year-long absence, look for Captain America to be The Guy next year. Creators Mark Waid and Ron Garney revived the Super-Soldier once before, and their much-acclaimed return to his book practically assures him as next year's hero to beat.

sensitive '90s guy he is, Tim tells her they're too young to have sex. But apparently, nice guys *do* finish last—the couple is then "caught" by Ari's uncle, Tim is forbidden to see her and she's banished to an all-girls school.

Problem: Because he can't see Ariana anymore, and as much as he hates to admit it, Robin's growing more attracted to Spoiler, which definitely poses a crisis of Tim's emotions.

Problem: Tim's dad finds out about the "teddy" incident and grounds him (and, consequently, Robin). Imagine a superhero watching a terrorist situation on TV and not being able to do a thing about it.

Problem: Because he wasn't strong enough to lift a wooden beam off a young criminal's chest, Robin watched him drown.

All these problems—mixed with some superhero action—make Robin real easy to relate to. Sure, he runs around in tights, knows martial arts and even hangs around the Bat-cave. But if we were in his shoes, we'd make the same mistakes he does.

Robin (opposite) has become the Spidey of the '90s by facing many problems, in and out of costume.

Best Villain BARON ZEMO

WE CAN HEAR IT NOW: "WHAT'S A DR. DOOM WANNABE LIKE BARON ZEMO DOING HERE?" Make that "*former* wannabe." With his starring role in *Thunderbolts*, Zemo has been elevated from the posers to the powerhouse elite of Marvel's villains. Instead of his manipulations and schemes becoming bad supervillain clichés, Baron Zemo's ultimate plan to take over the Marvel Universe is finally *working*.

No longer a lightweight, Baron Zemo could be the most successful of all Marvel villains.

Zemo resurfaced into the comic book scene this year in grand fashion. He and his Masters of Evil have disguised themselves as the superhero team the Thunderbolts, scamming their way into gaining the trust of the U.S. government, other superheroes and the public in an effort to bring their plan to fruition.

When the heroes of the Avengers and Fantastic Four vanished to an alternate universe during their battle against Onslaught, Zemo saw his dream of destroying his enemies shattered. He needed a new purpose. Then it hit him—Zemo would take advantage of the situation that presented itself. What if the Masters of Evil pretended to be superheroes and gained the world's trust to get what they ultimately wanted to conquer? Enter the Thunderbolts. Zemo is now admired and adored by the American public under the identity of Citizen V, donning a patriotic red-white-and-blue costume and "fighting" for truth, justice and the American way.

Filling the role of the Avengers, FF and the other heroes that have disappeared, Zemo has built up the Thunderbolts' reputation to the point where he's even manipulated his way into basing the team's operations out of the FF's headquarters. This could be the greatest scheme any Marvel villain has hatched, the biggest hoax in the history of the Marvel Universe. And it's all stemming from the mind of Baron Zemo.

1998's VILLAIN TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

PROMETHEUS

This guy can not only take out Batman, but the entire JLA. DC Comics introduces Prometheus in a one-shot during "Villains Week" in December. Combining spiritual and magical powers with technological know-how, Prometheus will factor prominently and cause absolute chaos for the DC Universe throughout 1998.

Best Writer KURT BUSIEK

HE PULLED THE GREATEST SCAM IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS, killed the only "good" vampire around and made his readers feel like superhero sidekicks. And he did it with style—*his* style.

From Marvel's *Thunderbolts* to Image's Eisner award-winning *Astro City*, Busiek's unique writing style has a way of building up superheroes to godlike stature, while simultaneously humanizing them. Busiek brings the "awe-inspiring" world of superheroes down to the street level. In *Astro City*'s six-part "Confessor" storyline (issues #4-#9), readers stepped into the heroes locker room by tagging along with 15-year-old Brian Kinney as he donned the identity of the superhero sidekick Altar Boy. Like Brian, you learned the ropes of becoming an Astro City superhero.

Paul Schiraldi

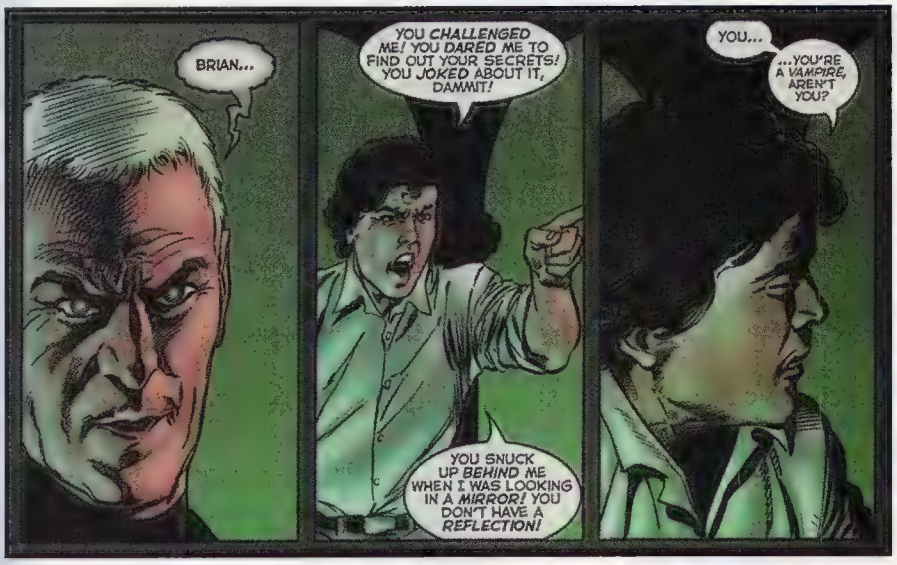
Mystery is another part of the writer's charm. Mixing an unknown serial killer in "Confessor," an alien invasion and a government crackdown on superheroes in the pages of *Astro City* was enough to keep readers guessing. But throwing in the mystery of the Confessor (the spooky superhero was really a vampire), just pushed the enjoyment level to 11.

And that's nothing compared to the secret Busiek kept tight under wraps. Before Marvel launched *Thunderbolts*, everyone thought these guys were just another superhero team ready to replace the Avengers. Corny name. Cheesy costumes. Powers we've seen a few too many times before. And we all fell for it—hook, line and sinker. Turns out these Thunderbolts are really the Masters of Evil in disguise. (Note: For more info about the T-Bolts' big scam, check out page 106.)

His "humanizing" perspective isn't lost on the Thunderbolts either. These guys are villains, and when they're behind closed doors away from the public eye, we finally get to see how they act. Much like *Astro City* lets you inside the superhero world, *Thunderbolts* opens our eyes to the world of the villain.

And Marvel recognizes Busiek's TLC of superheroes, enough to give him the writing reigns on two of its "Heroes Return" titles: *Avengers* and *Iron Man*. If that's not a testament to his skills, what is?

No matter how powerful the hero (like in Astro City, below) or evil the villain (Thunderbolts, above), Busiek makes you believe in them.

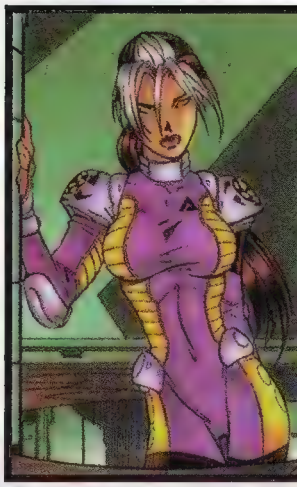


1998's WRITER TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

JOE KELLY

Joe Kelly's stints on *Deadpool* and *Daredevil* made us sit up and take notice in 1997. Now that he's been tapped for the monthly *X-Men* writing gig, it puts him in pole position for the top slot next year.

Best Artist JOE MADUREIRA

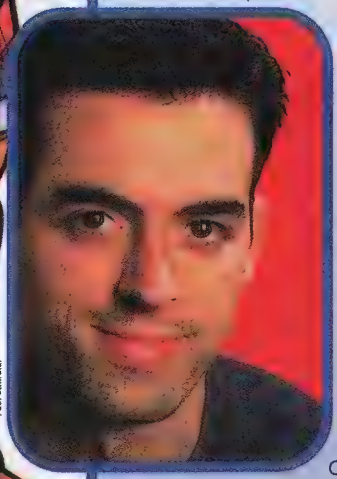


AT 23, JOE MADUREIRA HAS ALREADY INFLUENCED A MASSIVE ARTISTIC WAVE of mainstream comic books.

"Joe's definitely come into his own this past year and you can see him becoming more comfortable with his own style," says superstar artist Jim Lee. "I admire how he's influenced a whole new wave of artists by adopting a very well-defined manga style into American comics. And I think he's only going to get better. He is sparking the next generation of artists."

With big eyes, fluid action sequences and curvy/cartoony looking characters, Madureira's "manga" style has permeated the comic book industry. Who would have thought that when Madureira began *Uncanny X-Men* with issue #312 in 1993, he would take these classic X-characters and project this radical style upon them? And more importantly, who would've thought it'd work?

Now in 1997, Madureira has come into his own. This year alone, he's penciled one of the most detailed warships comic fans have seen in a long time (the Shi'ar warship in *Uncanny X-Men* #342) reminiscent of a technological spaceship from Japanimation. Madureira also wowed fans with his unique take on Spider-Man (*Uncanny X-Men* #346), projecting manga-like action on an already very fluid character.



Paul Schiraldi

Madureira's disciples aren't limited to just fans. Whether it's a young Roger Cruz or an established Andy Kubert, many artists admit to finding a hint of Madureira in their own work. "While I may not draw cartoony like Joe, I definitely find myself influenced by the guy," says Kubert. "Something about the energy he puts in his work, I now find myself trying to project the same type on my own work. He has a way of making the simplest things look exciting—just look at that Spidey he drew this year." In addition, Madureira's popularization of the manga style has paved the way for up-and-comers like Jeff Matsuda (former *X-Factor*, now *KaBoom*), Jose Ladronn (*Cable*) and Ed McGuinness (former *Deadpool*, now *Fighting American*).

The ability to design costumes is another of Madureira's strengths. An inventive designer with an amazing ability to create real-looking and practical costumes for super-powered beings, Madureira created three new X-Men this year—Maggott, Dr. Cecilia Reyes and the new-and-improved Marrow. The 1995 "Age of Apocalypse" storyline showcased Madureira's brilliance with a redesigned Sunfire, which was simplistically cool-looking, and the introduction of the wildly popular Blink.

"I love how Joe makes costumes look real," says penciler Humberto Ramos. "The material looks like it would if I saw it in real life and that's why Joe is great, because every artist wants to make their character designs look like Joe's do."

Madureira has left *Uncanny X-Men* with issue #350 to do a creator-owned book titled *Battle Chasers* for his new Cliffhanger imprint at Image's WildStorm Productions. *Battle Chasers* will give Madureira the opportunity for complete artistic freedom. Madureira promises even more manga-influenced storytelling and action sequences.

In the meantime, Madureira has hit greatness this year on *Uncanny X-Men* and all we can do is drool over the possibilities of him getting even better as he's let loose in 1998.

Madureira's manga design in Uncanny X-Men *(seen in Bishop and Rogue, above), helped influence a new American comic art style.*

1998's ARTIST TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

ANDY KUBERT

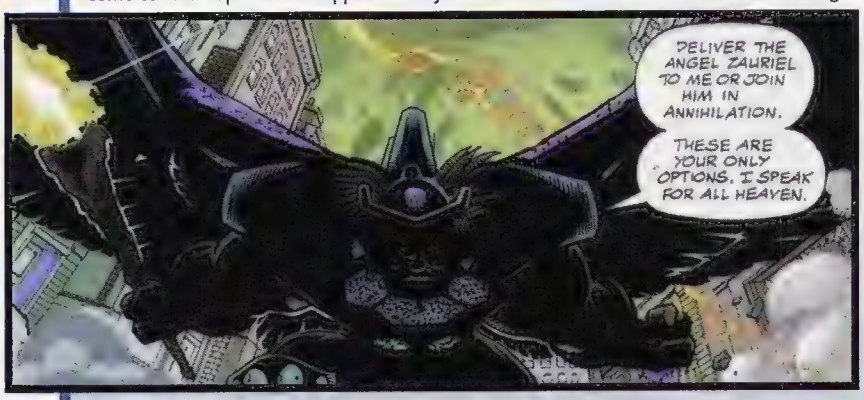
Andy Kubert's path to success has been the road less traveled. After a solid stint on *X-Men*, Kubert's stock has soared as he's breathed new life into a long-forgotten Marvel character, Ka-Zar. Sure, his work on a team book like *X-Men* was fun and lively, but *Ka-Zar* has allowed Kubert's skills to blossom by focusing on one main character with a small supporting cast. Ranging from wide-open jungle scenes to action sequences in the concrete jungle, Kubert's art on *Ka-Zar* is among the most energetic and spectacular we've seen in a while.

Best Slugfest '97

JLA vs. HEAVEN AND HELL

MOVE OVER TYSON AND HOLYFIELD—the fight of the year *really* happened in *JLA* #6-#7.

And this time, the JLA doesn't test its mettle battling a mere Martian invasion or some wimpy would-be world conqueror. No, this time the team goes to war against the hordes of Heaven and Hell, at the same time! A couple problems, though, that the team must overcome to win: Superman's trapped in the JLA Watchtower. Batman is M.I.A. Flash is caught midstream in a teleporter device. The moon is hurtling towards Earth. Needless to say, the stakes were kinda high.



As if normal supervillains weren't enough—the JLA got to fight angels from Heaven itself!

It all begins when a newly "retired" guardian angel called Zauriel came to the Earthly plane as a mortal in search of true love. Sounds cushy, but an army of renegade warrior angels from Heaven follow him in order to terminate him. Why? Zauriel knows of their plan to overthrow God and rule Heaven itself. And if Earth is to be destroyed in the process, so be it.

Taking advantage of the situation is Neron, DC's ruler of Hell. Neron and three of his demons decide to up the ante on our heroes by trapping Superman and Flash in their moon headquarters, preventing the only two heroes who have any chance of beating the angels from joining the fray. Oh, and just for kicks, Neron knocks the moon out of orbit and sends it crashing toward Earth. The JLA was toast, right?

Nah—they had their opponents right where they wanted them.

Superman, using his electromagnetic powers, repelled the moon from the Earth—putting it back into orbit—and raced to Earth. Flash figured out he had to alter his rate of molecular motion to pull free of the teleporter and join the battle. Wonder Woman tore apart the angels immense transport. Flash discovered the angels existed as supersonic sound vibrations; with the help of Green Lantern he created a sound cannon and wiped the angels from the Earthly plane.

So what can we glean from all this? Simple: while the X-Men and Avengers are pretty formidable superteams, the JLA is in a class all by itself. These two issues of *JLA* prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the JLA truly is the most powerful superhero team of 'em all.

1998's SLUGFEST TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

AVENGERS vs. THUNDERBOLTS

Hey, who *isn't* waiting for this? Ever since the T-Bolts' true nature was revealed, Marvel fans've been chomping at the bit for these two teams to clash. And we're betting it's gonna happen in '98. Reserve your tickets now.

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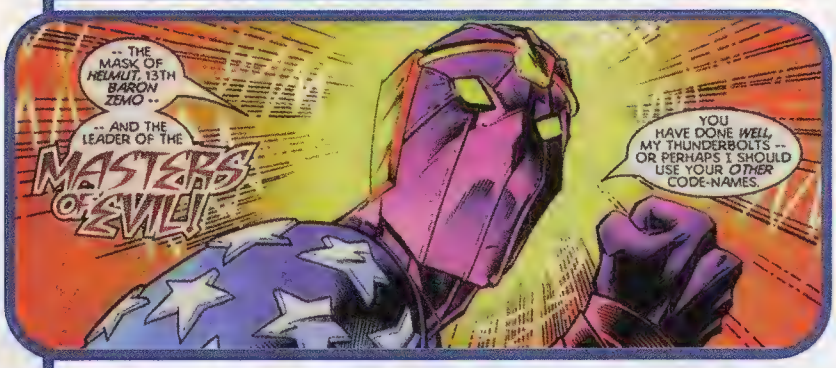
Best Moment THUNDERBOLTS REVEALED!

'97



C'mon, admit it—even YOU were shocked that the T-Bolts were really the Masters of Evil.

THE TEASE WAS THERE...AND WE DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE IT. All fans knew about the Thunderbolts prior to the release of *Thunderbolts* #1 was "One Team, One Goal, One Dark Secret." But no one saw the dark secret that was the shock ending of #1—the unmasking of the T-Bolts and the revelation they were actually the Masters of Evil in disguise.

The most masterful part of it all? Marvel went through an extensive marketing campaign with the Thunderbolts. The team appeared in the *Tales of the Marvel Universe* anthology and *Incredible Hulk* prior to the release of *Thunderbolts* #1. Creators Kurt Busiek and Mark Bagley did interviews in *Wizard* and other magazines, all the while keeping their trump card well hidden. The result? The best moment of 1997 and something that's hard to find in comics today, where everything is solicited and available to readers three months in advance: A true surprise.

"We fought like hell to keep the ending of *Thunderbolts* #1 a secret," writer Busiek says. "We yanked copy from solicitations and promotional write-ups. We played interviews as if the team was what it appeared to be." Still, there was apprehension. "It was a delicious feeling to know that we had an actual, honest-to-God surprise coming. I couldn't wait for the book to come out and see if it worked."

It worked. Practically no one saw the shock ending coming, and when it hit, it hit hard. Response was so huge that Marvel went back to press for a second printing. "It was gratifying to hear from other pros who were taken in, too," Busiek says. "They told me they hadn't been surprised by a comic in over a decade, but *Thunderbolts* took 'em off guard. It was sweet."

1998's MOMENT TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

THE RETURN OF TRADITIONAL SUPERMAN

Face facts: Electro-Supes in blue hasn't exactly taken fans by storm. DC has been very non-committal as to whether the classic Superman with classic costume and classic powers will return, but we have to think it's a natural. So here's to the inevitable return of Big Blue in '98, just in time for his 60th birthday.

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Best Sleeper Book AKIKO '97

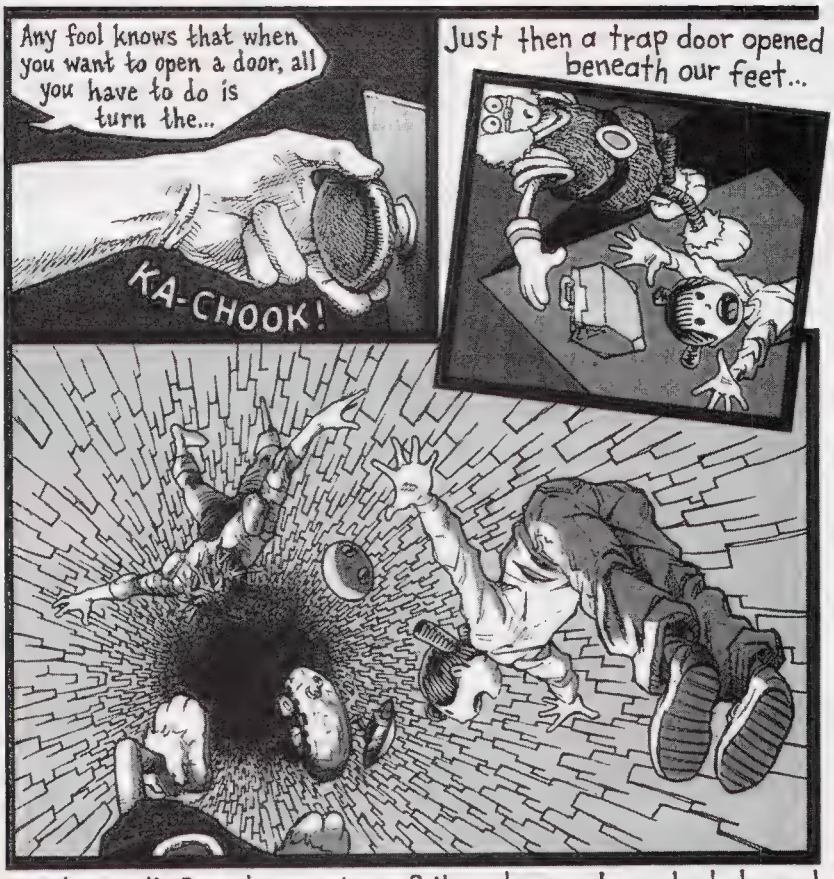
THE ART ISN'T TRADITIONAL SUPERHERO STUFF, and in fact could be best described as "cartoony." It's in black and white. And of all strange things, it's told through the point-of-view of a fourth-grade girl. It's also one of the best comics we can find on the racks today, just *because* of all these reasons.

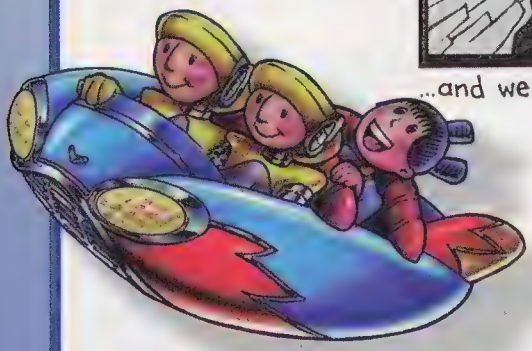
Its star, Akiko, is a fourth-grader from Earth who is summoned to the bizarre and wondrous planet Smoo to help find Smoo's kidnapped prince. It's great space opera and wonderful high adventure, but told with a twist: Instead of the princess getting rescued, it's the princess *doing* the rescuing. The cartoon-like art as pulled off by creator Mark Crilley allows for some of the most telling and emotional expressions you'll find on a comic character's face. And in this comic, "black and white" doesn't equal "boring." The incredible computer-aided shading and blending effects create the deepest, richest tones you're likely to find in any book, colored or not. And that fourth-grade girl perspective? It's a breath of fresh air, not often seen in comics.

"I immersed myself in girls!" admits Crilley, when asked how he can write that way. "I used to teach English to young girls in Japan and Taiwan for five years. I practically lived in a day-care center. I try to reproduce that youthful speech in a way that sounds real."

Unfortunately, not enough people are listening. Print runs on *Akiko* still hover around a very low 5,000-copy level monthly, but publisher Sirius Entertainment says that leftover back issues are disappearing fast as people catch on to the title. So wake up, comic fans—you're missing out on a real gem here.

Even a diehard superhero fan will like the adventure in Akiko.





1998's SLEEPER BOOK TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

MAJOR BUMMER

When people finally find this book, *Major Bummer* (issue #7 is currently on stands) should take off. The stories are funny as hell and the art is lavish and detailed. The story of Lou Martin, a reluctant slacker-superhero fits the humorous vein that many readers today are diggin'.

Cover reproduction of ***Conspiracy***.
Fully painted artwork by Igor Kordey.
Inspired by 32-paged two-issue limited series written by Dan Abnett.
(December 17, 31 1997)

MARVEL

www.marvel.com or AOL at keyword: marvel

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Best New Character DOGWELDER

COMICS, REMEMBER, ARE A FANTASTIC MEDIUM. Anything can happen in them, and the special-effects budget is always zero. Any name can happen, too.

Case in point: Dogwelder. Quite simply, he welds dogs to bad guys' faces. As a member of the misfit hero group Section Eight, he fights the good fight in the "Cauldron" neighborhood of Gotham City—the baddest section of a badass town—in the pages of *Hitman*.

For those of you unfamiliar, *Hitman* is the tongue-firmly-planted-in-cheek tale of Tommy Monaghan, metahuman assassin and Cauldron resident. In September's *Hitman* #18, things get a bit hot for Tommy. Enter Section Eight to save the day for Tommy. And easily the most oddball of the bunch is Dogwelder.

Dogwelder fits well in a book with a dark sense of humor. And "dark" and "humorous" are both attitudes *Hitman* has in spades. But surprisingly enough, the character—who is credited as being created by *Preacher* artist Steve Dillon—has light enough origins.

"Steve was sitting at a pub one time with a bunch of mates and they were all trying to come up with the stupidest superhero name ever," says *Hitman* artist John McCrea. "Steve said, 'Dogwelder,' and everyone else said, 'Okay, Steve. You win.'"

From there, the concept went to Garth Ennis, who writes both *Preacher* and *Hitman*. "Garth thought it was brilliant," McCrea continues. "But all he had was the name. He gave it to me to do the visual. With a name like that, coming up with the visual was easy."

So why's Dogwelder the best new character? He's funny. He's different. He's something you never thought you'd see in a million years. He makes you laugh. He's testament to the fact that no matter how many Super-somethings and Spider-things may be out there, there's always room for something different. And, as McCrea says, "It's comics. If you can't take a flier like this once in a while, what can you do?"

1998'S NEW CHARACTER TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON:

????????????????

How the hell should we know? If we knew who was gonna be the top *new* character a whole year in advance, we wouldn't bother doing this *Wizard* crap. We'd be at the track playing the ponies. Now move along.

What Were They Thinking?

THE BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENTS OF 1997

THE END OF "OPERATION: ZERO TOLERANCE" • With a great build-up (the extermination of all mutants), big things were expected of the X-Men's multi-issue "Zero Tolerance" storyline. Instead, fans just got Zero. A gutted X-Mansion? Big deal, it's been blown up once before. Cyclops with a bomb in his chest? Gee, we think he'll live. New members? Ugh, like there aren't enough X-Men as it is. The status quo before "Tolerance" is amazingly similar to the status quo after "Tolerance." Listen up, Marvel: If fans are going to stick with a giant crossover story like "Tolerance," it damn well better have a payoff.

SPIDEY STILL SUCKS • Just when Spider-Man was supposed to be on the road to recovery, villain Norman Osborn reappears after being dead for 24 years of continuity. Osborn, the original Green Goblin, had a cool, meaningful death and his name always haunted Peter Parker. Now that he's been resurrected as a Kingpin wannabe, he's regrettably been reduced to a bad joke. This move is yet another fizzle in Spidey's web-shooter.

"HEROES REBORN" • What makes the Marvel Universe great is that it's just that: One Universe. When Marvel's great core characters were pulled from it into another, everything that happened in this alternate "Reborn" universe is now moot and practically forgotten. It's a shame this successful marketing gimmick treated the fans to a full year of nothing.

MORE BAD COMIC FLICKS • "Batman & Robin" was so bad it caused Warner Bros. to consider dumping the franchise. "Spawn" relied too heavily on special effects with a disjointed story. "Steel" hit theaters for, what, two weeks? And the future doesn't look brighter with Nicolas Cage starring as Superman.

LAME COMIC VIDEO GAMES • More than ever, superheroes in video games fall victim to bad representation and horrific unoriginality. *Batman & Robin* is just a weak side-scrolling game where Batman could just as easily be a guy in a leather (cont'd)

(Frame) Collection of cover reproductions from ***Generation X/Gen 13***.
Pencil and ink art by Salvador Larroca and Cam Smith.
Inspired by 48-page crossover written by James Robinson. (December 3, 1997)

(Interior) Cover reproduction from ***WildC.A.T.S./X-Men: The Dark Age***.
Pencil and ink art by Mat Broome and Sean Parsons.
Inspired by 48-page one-shot written by Warren Ellis. (December 31, 1997)

MARVEL www.marvel.com or AOL at keyword: marvel WILDSTORM

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Publisher of the Year DC COMICS

THE STRENGTH STARTS WITH THE CAPES-AND-TIGHTS CROWD, and then DC Comics takes it an extra step.

In addition to having solid, world-recognized superheroes like Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman—and a killer franchise in the Justice League of America where they all come together—DC has a publishing plan. "Adult contemporary" fans can read the edgy, mature readers Vertigo line of titles. Helix is the comics imprint for sci-fi buffs. And DC's "Adventures" and "Cartoon Network" titles present animated-style fun that provides a great draw for kids and great stories for readers of any age. DC lays out—hands down—the most well-rounded comic menu a fan is going to find.

Sure, Image Comics' Top Cow Studio exploded in popularity in 1997, but there's not enough variety in its fantasy-oriented line to overtake DC. And though not all of DC's books are top-notch, the best of DC's line are the best comics out there. Period.

Pick up an issue of *JLA*, *Nightwing* or *Preacher* and just try to tell us we're wrong. W

What Were They Thinking? ...continued

jacket from that old *Double Dragon II* game. Or how 'bout *X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse*, a *DOOM* knock-off where, instead of shooting zombie marines like in *DOOM*, you shoot...the X-Men?? C'mon! Let's see a cool 3-D *Tomb Raider*-esque Spider-Man video game where Spidey gets to crawl all around walls, swing on web lines, and be able to flip and dodge multiple attacks from his rogue's gallery. It would look awesome and make sense.

CANCELATION OF AZTEK • This was a great series with a fresh perspective on superheroes. It was canceled with issue #10 and didn't get any support from DC despite the fact that: 1) Aztek was about to get a boost from appearing in its best-selling title, *JLA*, and 2) was co-written by fandom's #1 writer, Grant Morrison. When DC schlock like *Jack Kirby's Fourth World* and *Scare Tactics* survive beyond issue #10, it baffles the mind. ■ *The* Wizard *Staff*

1998's PUBLISHER TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON: MARVEL COMICS

Why not? Marvel's got a string of hot books like *Deadpool* and *Ka-Zar* just launched in '97. It's finding and developing new talent like artists Leinil Yu on *Wolverine* and Jose Ladronn on *Cable*. Best of all? The company's core heroes have just returned to a reunited Marvel Universe done by some of the industry's best creators. Marvel will be the kings of the superhero heap in '98.

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STRANGE Tales

The Wizard Bullpen 1997 Year in Review

By the Wizard Staff

Get a life? We *got* a life!

Okay, it's not much of a life, and it seems like half the stuff we do socially is somehow comic-related. But after hours, when we're not doing our best to bring you 208 monthly pages of the best high-octane comic-based entertainment you can find, we do...things.

And the things we do are probably a lot like the things you do. We take vacations, go on picnics, attend concerts and play in softball leagues. We also sometimes binge-drink, steal stuff, beat our co-workers senseless and crash our cars. Just look and see what has happened here in the past 12 months...

JANUARY

Just to prove how darned manly they are, eight of our (fortunately male) staffers shaved their mugs clean and saw what kind of groovin' facial hair they could accumulate in 30 days. Each ponied up a massive $2 entry fee, with the winner taking all. The winnah and still champeen: lovely and talented Assistant Editor

STUBBLE BUMS (above): Wizard staffers engage in a hair-growing contest. The winner: Assistant Editor Andrew Kardon (inset).

Andrew Kardon, who grew a spiffy-lookin' and snuggly-soft beard. The big loser: master of customer service Dan DiGiacomo, who grew exactly six straggly hairs and looked more bare than bear at the end of it all. "It was the easiest $16 I ever made," said Kardon. "If those follically challenged wimps wanna have a go again, I'll show them what real hair is any day."

Also in January...Doug Goldstein, the man who heads up our one-shot specials, tries to get everyone in the office to use a new word he invented: ASAPer, as in "As Soon As Possible + er" and meaning something that has to be done right away. After weeks of futile attempts and constant heckling, the experiment is deemed a failure and he no longer speaks to us....The "Star Wars Special Edition" movie is released. Assorted Wizard Press staffers cut out of work early, head out to New York City and end up standing in line for four hours in 20-below temperatures. Highlight of the night: the guy dressed as Boba Fett getting his ass kicked for trying to cut the line.

MARC'S CHASIN' CARPENTER (above): *Wizard* stalker Marc Wilkofsky corners singer Mary Chapin Carpenter.

THE NEWLYWED GAME (right): *Wizard* Head Honcho Gareb Shamus takes the plunge.

FEBRUARY

Attack of the newbies! The juggernaut that is *Wizard* grows so much that a bevy of new Wizardites were invited to join the staff. Former Marvel Bullpener Cindy Emmert joined our design team, Greg Orlando arrived as a new copy editor and Lars Pearson debuted as our new in-house price guide guru. Cindy flew through her blindfolded initiation rites and settled into her new job quickly. Seemingly immune to the over-the-top zaniness that is the always-edgy, occasionally flatulent *Wizard* staff, Cindy was unimpressed. "The Marvel Bullpen has people that make the staff here seem normal by comparison. Gee, that's a scary thought. No one here is really normal."

Also in February...One Gareb S. Shamus, the guy who owns this place, marries the former Lisa Geisenheimer. The wedding is beautiful, the catering kosher....Copy Editor Marc Wilkofsky makes good on a New Year's resolution by meeting his idol, country singer Mary Chapin Carpenter, at a book signing. Ms. Carpenter is heard to have said, "Marc, you're unbelievable," reportedly in reference to Marc's repeated trips through the line....Longtime *Wizard* columnist Tom Palmer Jr. joins the Wizard Press staff as assistant editor on *ToyFare*, our squinky-swell collectible toy publication.

JEDI NIGHT (below): The bullpen at the "Star Wars" re-premiere.

MARCH

Speaking o' *ToyFare*, the esteemed editor of that publication, one Mr. Scott Beatty, proved that he's geekier than the average *Wizard* bear by beating both Lars Pearson and Marc Wilkofsky in a "DC Jeopardy!" game show that we rigged up in the WizardDome, our cavernous warehouse. Scott walked away with a prize (Jim Lee's

"WHAT IS...A COMIC GEEK?" (above): "DC Jeopardy!" gives Wizard its comic book trivia champ, *ToyFare* editor Scott Beatty (inset).

robe, stolen at the 1996 San Diego Comicon)...and a mortal enemy. "I still bear the scars of my bitter defeat," Lars said, "and I will exact my revenge! *Revenge!*" A return bout is rumored to be in the works for early '98.

Also in March...Tom Palmer Jr. moves into a house already occupied by Doug Goldstein and *Wizard* writer Matt Senreich. Palmer describes the house as "dank" and the shower as "hairy."...Ace *Wizard* researcher Dan Reilly celebrates his second wedding anniversary with his blushing bride Nora in tropical Aruba. They see no fewer than two couples...uh...enjoying each other in the hotel hot tub. No arrests are made....We buy something called the "Chicago Comicon."

APRIL

Ever looking to prove our athletic prowess, the *Wizard* staff decided to beat up on a few old men. So we took on a group of Woodstock, N.Y.-based comic writers and artists including Terry Austin, Todd Dezago, Fred Hembeck, Ron Marz, Jim Starlin and Bernie Wrightson in *their* chosen game: volleyball. The outcome? We got our collective asses kicked. "You guys suck," *Green Lantern* writer Ron Marz was later heard to say. "And you've got no class, sticking us with the tab." See, the losers were supposed to pick up the after-game dinner check, but we unfortunately went to a restaurant that didn't take credit cards. The Woodstock boys had to pass the hat to cover the bill. "Actually, I planned the whole meal thing that way," said the ever-sneaky Matt Senreich. "We show them who run Barter Town!" A rivalry was born.

DEATH VOLLEY (right): Old guys who write and draw comics squash Team Wizard.

Also in April...nothing happened. Absolutely nothing.

MAY

Yee-haw! Wizard Press tore up the countryside in the first-ever office Scavenger Hunt! We figured that since we do a magazine Scavenger Hunt contest for readers every year and everyone seems ta love it, we'd get in on the love this time 'round! After getting items like a gas station receipt for 17 cents and a *live* bug inside one of them plastic vending machine capsules, our champion team was crowned: The "Kung-Fu Fighters," featuring such *Wizard* stalwarts as Andrew Kardon and Administrative Assistant Jen Cavallo, got the most points. "It was a ton of fun," said Cavallo, who walked away with a free dinner, a reserved office parking space and a bonus vacation day for being a winner. "I need the extra vacation day to recover from having to see Buddy Scalera's naked torso as part of the 'wear your clothes backwards' part of the hunt."

Also in May...That Kardon guy is busy! He proposes marriage to longtime girlfriend Allison Thau—and Allie, despite the fact that she's stone-cold sober, says yes! The couple is set to hitch in July 1998....Design Manager Steve Blackwell, master of all things trivial, tries out to be a contestant of the real-life (non-DC *Wizard*) "Jeopardy!" Steve takes the test, but finishes a mere *two* questions off the pace to make the show!...Cavallo's busy, too! She, Matt Senreich and Editor-in-Chief Pat McCallum vacation in Florida, where McCallum

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THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT TIGGER (right): Surly Disneyworld rep disses Wizardites.

is continously dissed: First, Tigger refuses to high-five him at Disneyworld, Senreich almost kills him in go-karts and he almost gets into a brawl with a waiter in the French restaurant in Epcot. %$#*ing French.

JUNE

Interns-a-go-go! Wizard got quintuply (Is that a word?) blessed as five—Count 'em!—five interns joined the staff for the summer. Mark Aronowitz, Nachie Castro, Andrew Guschl, Randi Rodin and Micah Smith all made our lives bearable by taking on all the crap work we don't wanna have to do and getting a real "educational experience" in the bargain. Was it worth it for them? Maybe. Look at the exit comment from Micah Smith about our resident "Magic Words" writer and draw your own conclusion: "Everyone was pretty good. Jim McLauchlin took some getting used to, but I soon learned to tune him out, although I think my ears will still be ringing for years to come. At least I didn't have to get him coffee." All our interns are alive and well, back at the schools of their choice and washing the stink of Wizard off themselves.

Also in June...No lie: An Italian/Indian restaurant called "Corleone's Taj Mahal" opens around the corner from the Wizard Press offices. We eat there once—ONCE!—and leave after being asked to appear in their TV commercial. Why'd they ask us? We're the only customers in the place....The "Jelly Gauntlet," an annual staff weight-loss competition, is begun. The eventual loser? *ToyFare*'s Scott Beatty, who has to wear a dress and wash the car of the competition winner, the now not-so-portly Buddy Scalera. But giant wuss that he is, Beatty wimps out and refuses to do it! The plan is to fire him the day before Christmas for being such a wanker.

CROSSED DRESSER (above): A staffer refuses to wear panties.

INTERNAL DISTRESS (below): The hands-on corruption of today's youth.

JULY

We bought Chicago! Okay, maybe not the whole city, but we did buy the Chicago Comicon, at least! No less than 34 Wizard staffers, interns and assorted

WHEEL OF MISFORTUNE (below): Fans are cheated out of loot at the Chicago Comicon.

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hangers-on chartered (some would say "hijacked") a plane (well, first a bus and then a plane) and headed to the Windy City, where hijinks aplenty ensued. Aside from all the official crap like the Wizard Fan Awards, celebrity panels, etc., the fun stuff included the Wizard staffers getting lost in the seedier side of Chi-Town the night before the show started, Marc Wilkofsky, Phil Colligan, Dan DiGiacomo and Glenn Haight watching George Takei work out and Doug Goldstein, Matt Senreich and Specials Assistant Editor Matt Saunders having breakfast with the guys who play Chewbacca, Boba Fett and Darth Vader. A splendid time was had by all, no bones were broken and very few arrests were made. It was such a hoot, we're doin' it again next year!

DISROBING (right): We stiff Jim Lee for $30 in hotel fines.

MARIOTARTS (below): Video-game hijinks lead to a felony.

"MEATBALLS IX" (above): Picnic at a park leads to tick infestation.

Also in July...Continuing a San Diego Comicon tradition now a whopping two years in the making, *Wizard* steals Jim Lee's bathrobe from his hotel room. Next year, we get his underpants....A no-occasion-necessary party is held at *casa de* McLauchlin, attended by a variety of *Wizard* staffers and comic pros. On the morning-after clean-up, McLauchlin finds—Under his bed, no less!—both Greg Orlando's shorts and *Vampirella* penciler Amanda Conner's MasterCard! Now that's a party.

AUGUST

It's video mayhem as lines were drawn for the big N64 Super Mario Challenge! Fortunately for any geographically challenged Wizardites, the lines were drawn very simply according to where people lived. The house mentioned earlier that contains Doug Goldstein, Tom Palmer Jr. and Matt Senreich (we'll call them "*Los Hombres Macho*") took on the Brian Cunningham-Mike Fasolo-Andrew Kardon-Pat McCallum shared-house (we'll dub them "*No Macho Hombres*") in a round of Super Mario Kart64 for Nintendo 64. The winners? *Los Hombres Macho* in a landslide! And how did the *No Macho Hombres* handle the defeat? By breaking into *Los Hombres Macho*'s house two weeks later in the middle of the night and stealing the MarioKart belt that was won in the tourney! Did more retaliation ensue? Nope. *Hombres Macho* spokesman Goldstein said that the belt will actually *remain* in the *No Macho Hombres* house, where, he noted, "It will serve as a monument to the painful memory of their loss." Now that's cold.

Also in August...The first-ever Wizard Summer Picnic is held at Krucker's, a nearby park. *Piñatas* are whacked, beer is guzzled,

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and a prize for "Largest Tick Bite" is awarded....The Wizard Press softball team sees its season end with a second-round playoff loss to Fordy's Bar, the eventual league champs. Hey! Quit snickering! We made the playoffs, at least!...A crew of *Wizard* staffers, in need of weekend fun, give money to the mob by going to a casino. Actually, Matt Senreich, the world's luckiest mortal, comes out $150 ahead of the game. Everyone else loses their shirts.

SEPTEMBER

Not wanting to take defeat lying down, we found a way to beat the decrepit old men from Woodstock in a game that requires a wider range of motion: softball! And we made sure we have the home-field advantage, just in case! They made the trek to lovely metropolitan Congers, and the battle was joined at Zukor Park. A seven-inning tilt was planned, and things were going smoothly as Team Wizard was cruising, up 9-0 in the sixth. But overconfidence was almost our downfall, as Team Woodstock put 10 runs on the board in the seventh. Our only chance: pushing across two runs in the bottom of the seventh to win. We did it, thanks to Production Manager Darren Sanchez delivering a two-RBI double. Feeling vindicated, and not nearly as crappy as we used to, we headed off to a local Bennigan's, where we...bought them the dinner that we should have paid for way back in April after the volleyball game.

BALL BEARERS (above and left): The staff vs. Young Marvel Guys.

Also in September... Remember those tick bites? Well, vacationing Managing Editor Joe Yanarella picks one up while in South Carolina, and it gets infected! Kind souls that we are, we send Joe a "get well" gift basket that includes a copy of *Honcho* magazine. Look it up....Meanwhile, Matt Senreich, further developing the "Star Wars" actor fixation he picked up in Chicago, drives to Philadelphia to have breakfast with Anthony Daniels, the man who played C-3PO. Breakfast is great, but on the drive back, Matt crashes his car. Matt is unhurt, but the car is a mess....*Sensational Spider-Man* #21 hits, featuring a supporting character named "Gunther Senreich." Hmmm. Makes ya wonder where the inspiration came from....Place your bets! The first annual Wizard Foosball Tournament is under way! With two-man teams filling up a 12-team, two-division league, staffers battle it out for mondo cash prizes! Team names like The Loose Stools, Midgets with a Mission and The Spastic Monkeys ensure we'll never endorse any sneakers or stuff.

© & ™ **MARVEL:** In a cagey maneuver, Marvel Comics copyrights Matt Senreich.

OCTOBER

AND THE REST OF THE YEAR...

As Promotions Coordinator Kathy Newman headed out to vacation in Scotland, Wizard staffers strapped on their bowling shoes and looked to squash comic industry types in one of America's favorite challenges. Our victims: Writers James Felder (*What If?*), Joe Kelly (*X-Men*) and Ben Raab (*Excalibur*)—aided and abetted by WildStorm artist John Cassaday (*Desperadoes*)—who all fell before the fury of our 16-pound balls.

Also in October...Truth be told, this article is being written in mid-October, so we just don't know what'll be happenin' for the rest of the year. We're sure there'll be the traditional hijinks closing out the year, including the third-annual superhero Halloween costume party, the discussions of who had the best gas-after-Thanksgiving stories, the warm and fuzzy Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa party, the anonymous and always embarrassing-when-you-unwrap-it holiday grab-bag, and all the inevitable random phenomena that seem to stalk Wizard Press and its staffers. But for now, that's the year. So go, read the rest of the book, nail some annoying people with snowballs and we'll see you next month as we usher in '98.

Be good. **W**

The Wizard staff makes a perfect, affordable and easy-to-care-for Christmas gift! Just punch some air-holes in the box, give 'em some Slim Jims and stick 'em under the tree.

Bernie Wrightson

Gene Ha

Brian Stelfreeze

Steve Ditko

Moebius

Gil Kane

Liam Sharp

Arthur Suydam

Klaus Janson

Tanino Liberatore

Claudio Castellini

Al Williamson

Bob Layton

Massimiliano Frezzato

Steve Lightle

Jim Starlin

Simon Bisley

Hulk

Black Widow

Daredevil

Iron Man

Wolverine

Dr. Strange

Spider-Man

Captain America

X-Men

Vision

Avengers

Thunderbolts

Sabretooth

Thor

Sub-Mariner

Black Panther

Elektra

Hawkeye

Man-Thing

Collection of cover and interior artwork reproductions from ***Shadows & Light*** number one.
Painted and penciled black and white artwork by listed professionals.
Inspired by listed writers of quarterly 48-page continuing series featuring heroes of Marvel Universe. (December 24, 1997)

MARVEL

www.marvel.com or AOL at keyword: marvel

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THE FATE OF '98

'WIZARD' ANSWERS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMIC BOOK QUESTIONS FOR 1998

BY JIM McLAUCHLIN AND MATTHEW SENREICH
ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRED HEMBECK

WILL SUPERMAN PUT DC OVER THE TOP IN 1998, OR IS A 60-YEAR-OLD HERO STARTING TO SHOW HIS AGE?

BIG BLUE MIGHT AS WELL BE BIG GRAY. Even with a 60th anniversary in 1998 and a major-release movie planned for '99, Supes won't give DC Comics the boost the company got once upon a time from a certain Dark Knight Detective.

Many, many months before the "Batman" movie release in 1989, a larger Batmania swept the nation, fueled by Warner Bros.' widespread merchandising—the Bat-logo was all over the place, and the Caped Crusader was deemed cool. The resultant boost gave DC necessary steam. This time, Clark Kent takes center stage as "Superman Lives" is slated to hit the big screen in the first half of 1999. But on his 60th birthday, Superman is mired in problems that include a fear that he is too old for a young audience...and Nicolas Cage in a starring role.

"It's puzzling to me," says Scott McKim, a reporter for the entertainment trade journal *The Hollywood Reporter*. "Warner could make more money doing more George Clooney 'Batman' films. Most people have a problem with Nic Cage as Superman. The first thing they think is, 'This guy needs a hairpiece.'"

The lack of enthusiasm is seen in the licensing world. While "Batman" movie products were everywhere well in advance of the movie, the Superman landscape looks bleak by comparison. Even *Adventures of Superman* writer Karl Kesel thinks this is true. "Batman has been bigger in merchandising ever since the 1960s. I don't know if Superman can match it." Kesel is not expecting a huge bump in Superman comics, either. "Since the first 'Batman' movie, there's never been a sales bump associated with a movie. I think we'll get higher visibility, but I don't know about a big boost."

DC has another opportunity to focus on the character, but it's one the publisher seems to be downplaying: Supes' 60th anniversary will go largely uncelebrated, much to the chagrin of *Superman* writer Dan Jurgens, who says, "In 1998, Superman celebrates his 60th anniversary. You can't say that about anyone else in comics. He's the first. When you have somebody like that, it shows that you age. But he's still on top. Right now, the Superman franchise outsells Batman."

"[The Superman franchise] is still worth a lot," offers McKim. "If you drive past Warner Brothers, they've got four giant murals on the side of their building, and two of them are Batman and Superman. But the juice in town is that 'Superman' is a little far out there."

If you're looking for 1989 and "Batman" all over again, it ain't gonna happen.

WILL TODD McFARLANE EVER DRAW A COMIC AGAIN?

NO. And McFarlane himself will tell you: "There's nothing on the schedule. So I guess the short answer is, 'No.'"

The long answer is that the Spawn creator feels his time is constrained, and when push comes to shove, penciling gets shoved. "I'm only capable of juggling so many things," McFarlane says. "Spawn is now movies, TV, toys—empires, if you will. Adding penciling to all the stuff, I wouldn't be doing my best work."

Ironically enough, McFarlane's rise to fame came *as* a penciler, with stints on Marvel's *Incredible Hulk* and *Amazing Spider-Man*. From there, he went on to write, pencil and ink his creator-owned *Spawn*. But after September 1994's *Spawn* #24, McFarlane turned to Greg Capullo to pencil his top-selling creation. "I'm still an artist, just in other venues," McFarlane continues. "I haven't abandoned *Spawn* the way a lot of other guys abandoned their books. I still write and ink every issue."

The blank slate of penciling is McFarlane's main concern. "Penciling requires full concentration. I've got to lay out a page, do thumbnail sketches, render it. I've got to isolate myself to do that. I've practically got to lock myself in the closet. Inking? I can do that and be on the phone all day. Like now—I'm inking and talking. And I still ink the hell out of the book." But isn't McFarlane aware that his fans want him to pencil?

"Yeah, I think they do want me to," he says. "I think they feel a little frustration like I felt as a fan when John Byrne left *Uncanny X-Men*. But one of the reasons I stopped was that I didn't want to take shortcuts. I want the product to remain good."

McFarlane swears by the addition of Capullo as a quality issue. "I think the product is superior to what it was when I was penciling. We're stronger as a team than I was singly. Greg is focused on penciling and nothing else. End the conversation. He's the penciler."

But for how long? Could anything ever make McFarlane pencil again? "It will have to come from within. It will have to feed my own hunger. But I don't know if that will happen, either tomorrow or 10 years from now."

WILL WOLVERINE FINALLY GET HIS ADAMANTIUM BACK?

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.

"It's something Bob Harras, Steve Seagle and I have discussed," says new *X-Men* writer Joe Kelly. "I mean, do fans want his adamantium back?"

Kelly asks that question rhetorically. He's not blind to the overwhelming desire X-fans have to see the adamantium returned to Wolvie's skeleton. Ever since *X-Men* #25 in October 1993, when Wolverine's adamantium was viciously sucked off his bones through his skin's pores by Magneto, fans have been asking the inevitable question: When will the adamantium come back? "Everyone knows this wasn't a permanent change, but it's gone on for a long while now," says Kelly. "By giving his adamantium back, I think fans believe it'll return him to a certain badass status and make him more of the indestructible tank that he is. And if the fans want it, so do we."

So why hasn't Wolvie gotten his powerful metal back? What's up with the hesitation? "Steve [Seagle, *Uncanny X-Men* writer] and I are very committed to giving Wolvie back his adamantium. Being the new guys on the block, it's something that we want to do and do soon," says Kelly. "But if we give him back his adamantium, it will have to come at a cost.

1997 EVENTLINE

A look at this year's memorable moments
Compiled by Marc Wilkofsky

NOTE: Comics are listed by their release dates.

JANUARY

2 The 13-year-long "Who Is Hobgoblin?" mystery ends as he's revealed to be fashion mogul Roderick Kingsley (*?!?*) in *Spider-Man: Hobgoblin Lives!* #3

12 "X-Files" agents Mulder and Scully appear on "The Simpsons"

15 Artist Carlos Pacheco begins run on *X-Men* with issue #62; Nate Grey realizes he re-created Madelyne Pryor in *X-Man* #25; U.S astrophysicists Fred Adams and Greg Laughlin predict that universe's end won't happen for thousands of trillions of years

16 Bill Cosby's son Ennis shot and killed on an L.A. freeway

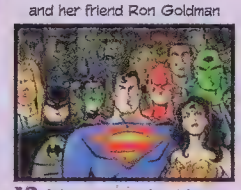
22 *Silver Surfer/Weapon Zero* concludes Marvel/Top Cow crossover

26 Green Bay Packers take Super Bowl XXXI over New England Patriots, 35-21

31 "Star Wars Trilogy Special Edition" begins with the re-release of "Star Wars" (below)

FEBRUARY

4 O.J. Simpson found liable in 1994 stabbing deaths of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman



12 *Adventures in the DC Universe* #1 stars DC heroes drawn in the "animated" style (above); *Marvel Adventures* #1 does the same; Michael Jackson's wife, Debbie Rowe, gives birth to his first son, Michael Jackson Jr.

20 *Thunderbolts* #1 shocks fandom as Baron Zemo and the Masters of Evil pose as heroes

21 Revamped "Empire Strikes Back" blasts back into theaters

23 Britain's *Observer* newspaper reports that Scotland researchers created first genetic clone of an adult mammal (a sheep named Dolly)

26 *Wonder Woman* hits 10th anniversary with #120

MARCH

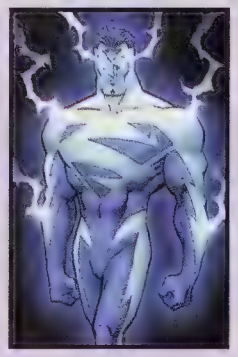
5 Mark Waid and Andy Kubert successfully relaunch *Ka-Zar* #1; *WildC.A.T.s/X-Men* #1 caps five years of speculation

7 Comic book writer Kim Yale (*Suicide Squad, Grimjack*) dies

9 Rap artist The Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) shot and killed

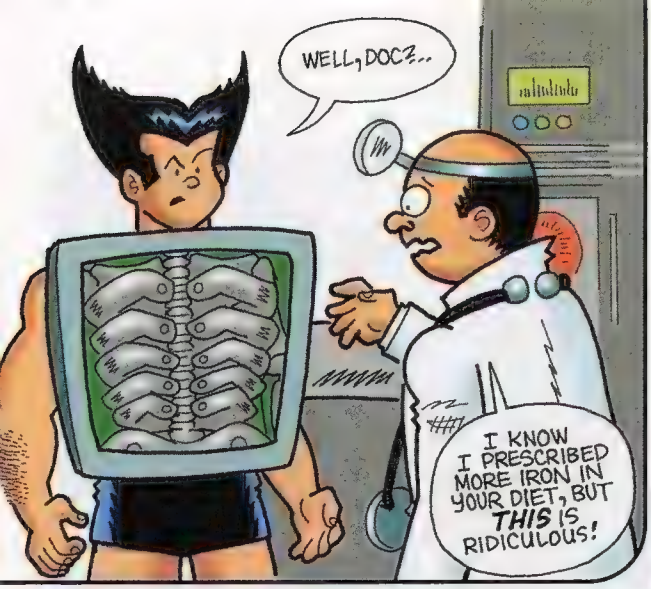
12 *Superman* #123 introduces Man of...Energy (at right), Tomorrow Woman joins JLA (then dies) in #5

14 "Return of the Jedi" returns to theaters



24 "The English Patient" sweeps Academy Awards

26 39 Internet-using, Hale-Bopp comet-crazed "Heaven's Gate" cultists found dead in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., estate (Lady Death would've cheered)



So it'd have to be a big story arc, and we just need to find the time to tell a story like that."

With the constant epic storylines being told in the Marvel Universe like "Onslaught" and "Operation: Zero Tolerance," the X-office hasn't had the time to insert an all-encompassing storyline to put the adamantium back on Wolverine's skeleton. But according to Kelly, that opportunity may arise within this next year. Wolverine will have a confrontation with Marrow that may spark Wolverine's desire to get his adamantium back. "Wolverine extends his hand to her and she nearly slashes his throat," says Kelly. "And because of that, he'll realize hanging out with the X-Men has softened him up. But at the same time, Wolverine flips out and tries to kill her, making him ask: Who does he want to be? That introspection could spin him off to a story of the magnitude of getting his adamantium back."

Bottom line is, fans want the adamantium back, and regardless of what the writers and editors say, bank on the metal's return...and with all-new creative teams looking to establish themselves on the X-Men, look for this story within the next year.

HAS SPIDER-MAN HIT ROCK BOTTOM?

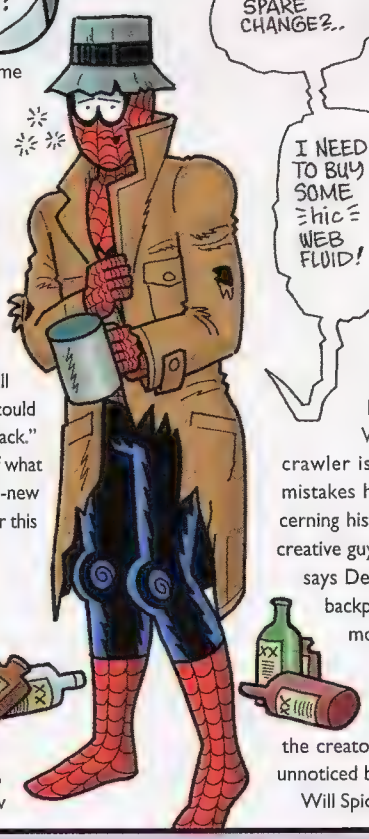
AS MUCH AS WE LOVE SPIDER-MAN, the web-slinger has hit an all-time low.

The Spidey titles are currently plagued by a host of problems, many of which his "spider-sense" can't protect him from. Low sales. A creative lull. And most importantly, Spider-Man has lost his endearing "everyman" quality.

And that quality was punctuated by the slew of problems Peter Parker faced both in his civilian ID *and* as Spider-Man. Girl problems. Money problems. School problems. Job problems. Problems maintaining his secret identity. And of course, supervillain problems. Let's face it: The guy never had a happy ending.

But right now, with the exception of seeing a marriage counselor, Peter's life is all rainbows. Now, Peter's married to a supermodel, he has a steady job with a steady income, school is working out just fine and it seems over a dozen people know Peter Parker is really Spider-Man.

Spidey just hasn't been Spidey lately, and the overall quality has yet to take an upturn. And it's made evident by the hero's stagnant sales. The entire X-Men franchise outsells the Spider-Man books, and since new artist Adam Kubert jumped onto *Incredible Hulk*, that title now outsells each book in the Spidey family as well.



"Spider-Man is only as dead as the fans allow him to be," says *Sensational Spider-Man* writer Todd Dezago. "If there is a decline in one character's popularity, then it is the responsibility of the people who love him to make him new and interesting again. That's where we are now."

But so far it hasn't been enough. Even with top-notch art teams including pencilers John Romita Jr., Steve Skroce, Mike Wieringo and Luke Ross, the wall-crawler is still barely breathing. "I think mistakes have been made in the past concerning his character, not necessarily by the creative guys chosen to work on the books," says Dezago. "We're now rectifying and backpedaling to make Spidey's problems more current and everything a little more temporal. I guess you can say we're in the process of bringing him back to life." But any changes the creators have enacted have so far gone unnoticed by the masses.

Will Spider-Man disappear? Of course not.

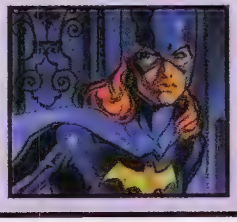
APRIL

2 Second wave of Amalgam books hits stores
9 Maggott first appears in *Uncanny X-Men* #345 (below)

13 21-year-old golfer Tiger Woods breaks several records by winning the 61st Masters (Here come the Frosted Flakes commercials...)
16 Adam Kubert takes on *Incredible Hulk* with #454; Dr. Cecilia Reyes debuts in *X-Men* #65
17 Rob Liefeld forms his newest venture, Awesome Entertainment, with partners Jeph Loeb and Scott Rosenberg
18 "DC Jeopardy!" hits *Wizard*, Scott "Master" Beatty wins; Kevin Smith's comic book-themed film "Chasing Amy," including shot of mock *Wizard* cover, opens
21 "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry's ashes (along with those of 23 others, including drug guru Timothy Leary) launched into space on U.S./Spain-sponsored scientific mission
30 Microwave Murderer revealed to be Danette Boucher in *Witchblade* #14; Ellen jumps out of the closet on controversial "Ellen" episode

MAY

4 Vertigo editor Lou Stathis dies of cancer
6 "X-Files" star David Duchovny marries actress Téa Leoni
7 *Cable* #-1 and *Uncanny X-Men* #-1 lead off Marvel's "Flashback Month"
11 IBM's Deep Blue computer trounces Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in New York City
19 Grand jury charges sportscaster Marv Albert with sexual assault
21 *Batman: Batgirl* (below) and *Batman: Poison Ivy* kick off four "Batman & Robin"-



celebrating books; *Heroes for Hire* #1 reteams the classic Power Man and Iron Fist with other Marvel heroes
23 "The Lost World: Jurassic Park" opens and kicks record-breaking butt
29 Superboy is stuck as a 16-year-old boy in *Superboy* #41

JUNE

2 Timothy McVeigh (after six-week trial—take notes, O.J. crew) convicted on all 11 charges in Oklahoma City bombing trial
4 *Uncanny X-Men* #346 kicks off "Operation: Zero Tolerance" mutant crossover, introducing Marvel's new gatefold-cover synopsis books (bringing $1.95 books to $1.99); Awesome Entertainment debuts with *Judgment Day Alpha*
7 Detroit Red Wings win NHL's Stanley Cup, beating Philadelphia Flyers 2-1
11 *Cable* #45 presents new scribe James Robinson (below); *X-Factor* #136 has

Sabretooth demolish and ditch the team; Gene Colan and Joe Kelly sign onto *Daredevil* with #366

The hero has been around since the early 1960s and will be around 30 years from now. Spider-Man, the character, still holds universal appeal for fans. However, with the upcoming storyline having Spidey create four all-new identities for himself while running from the law (see "1998 Preview" on page 76 for more details), it doesn't look like the hero will return to his roots anytime soon. The current Spidey is begging for a serious creative spark and unless he gets it, the Spider-Man titles will remain tangled in a web from which only his creators can free him. Marvel's signature character deserves better.

CAN JOE MADUREIRA SURVIVE WITHOUT THE X-MEN?

SURVIVE? YES. Maintain his level of popularity? Highly doubtful.

After four successful years on *Uncanny X-Men*, Joe Madureira has left comics' top franchise to leap to a brand-new creator-owned imprint and series early in 1998. And while Madureira is confident about the move, what it'll do to his career is the question.

"I consider the X-Men to be the beginning of my career and not the end," says Madureira, who kick-starts his book *Battle Chasers* next year. "Sure, I may not be as popular next year, but my art will get infinitely better; to me, that's what's important in the long run, and I think fans will agree after seeing it."

Others in the industry who had pursued similar career paths warn that Madureira is heading down a difficult road.

"Riding the X-Men wagon helps a person's career, and the true test of Joe's mettle will come as he does this new creator-owned title," says Event Comics publisher Joe Quesada. "I bounced around high-profile projects before starting Event Comics, but Joe only has X-Men really on his belt. It's not going to be easy."

Besides the obvious obstacle of leaving the No. 1-selling comic book for a virtually unknown property, Madureira feels the shift is necessary for his artistic improvement. "I got to a point on X-Men where deadlines were really tight, a lot of stuff was out of my control and I wasn't getting any better," says Madureira. "Now I'll have control over everything and the book will look exactly how I want a book to look. My hands were tied on the X-Men, but now I'm free."

"Joe has incredible talent and we're sure he'll succeed on his own project," says Marvel Editor-in-Chief Bob Harras. "I wouldn't be surprised if his fan base got even bigger now that he's left X-Men."

Still, Madureira is venturing into scary territory. Not only is he leaving the most recognizable comic book property in the world, but he's leaving to do a fantasy book, a type of title that traditionally does not sell as well as superhero titles. But will this turn out to be another low-selling, quickly forgotten *Conan*-like book or will Madureira spark another revolution in comics similar to the way he introduced manga-styled artwork into the mainstream? Only time will tell.

But in his favor, it's important to remember that Madureira's new project *Battle Chasers* will be part of a new WildStorm imprint called Cliffhanger, with Jim Lee's muscle behind him. And the new imprint is also going to feature hot young artists J. Scott Campbell and Humberto Ramos. "It helps to be working with some of the most talented artists out there," says Madureira. "It provides a security that might not be there if I did this on my own."

13 Bomber McVeigh sentenced to death
14 Final episode of "Lois & Clark" airs
18 *Alpha Flight* #1 relaunches the Canadian superteam
20 "Batman & Robin" (below) begins box-office freeze (to the tune of $43 million);

airline financier Carl Icahn becomes chairman of Marvel Entertainment Group
25 Spawn becomes Al Simmons again in #62, part of Image's "Spawn Month"
27 Comic creator Michael Diana's appeal to Supreme Court denied
28 Mike Tyson chews out Evander Holyfield by biting a piece of Holyfield's ear during heavyweight fight

JULY

2 "Men in Black" (below) blasts into theaters; *Kingdom Come* hardcover released with special eight-page epilogue; Confessor killed in *Astro City* #8; *Shi: Heaven and Earth* #1 returns Billy Tucci to writing and drawing the heroine

4 *Wizard* Fan Awards presented at Wizard Press' 1997 Chicago Comicon
9 *Marvel Team-Up* #1 brings back Spider-Man's team-up series; artist J. Scott Campbell leaves *Gen13* with #20; Helix's second wave begins with *Transmetropolitan* #1; *Bone* returns to Cartoon Books with #28
15 Gianni Versace fatally shot outside South Beach home
21 Warner Bros. announces Nicolas Cage is to star in its upcoming Superman movie with Tim Burton to direct

AUGUST

1 "Spawn" released to McFarlane-loving masses
6 Marvel files suit against Awesome Entertainment over *The Fighting American*
7 Garth Brooks' Central Park concert (Marc Wilkofsky's the only *Wizard* staffer to join the 250,000 spectators)
9 *TV Guide* features five-page Xena comic book story
13 Dr. Octopus returns from grave in *Amazing Spider-Man* #427; M revealed to be composed of twins in *Generation X* #31; Nightwing teams up with Batman in *Nightwing* #13; "South Park" debuts (below) giving Comedy Central its most kick-ass series premiere ratings ever

15 "Steel" hits theaters
18 Actor Jeep Swenson (Bane in "Batman & Robin") dies
20 Awesome Entertainment legally forced to change a number of Fighting American's features; *Squadron Supreme* paperback hits stands with writer Mark Gruenwald's ashes in the ink (below)

21 Hudson Foods recalls 25 million pounds of beef linked

"Joe's got two things working for him: He's young and he's talented," says Jim Lee. "When you do your own book, you have to build from scratch. So if he sticks with *Battle Chasers* and puts as much passion into the book as he put into *Uncanny X-Men*, he'll eventually convert the fans to [seeing] how much better he's become."

Madureira's renewed enthusiasm for his own work, his previous ability to influence mainstream comic book art and his new association with the hottest creators in the business will launch the artist's career in a new direction that will definitely remain in the limelight.

WILL THE MUCH-RUMORED "X-MEN" AND "SPIDER-MAN" MOVIES EVER BE MADE?

AN "X-MEN" MOVIE? Yes, and maybe sooner than you think. But "Spider-Man"? Don't hold your breath.

"I think 'X-Men' will certainly make it out. The script is being finished right now," says Stan Lee, chairman of Marvel Films. "I have no reason to think that it won't be out and won't be great. It could be out in late 1998, or maybe the beginning of 1999." That script is even being provided by someone with a bit of comic book experience—Ed Solomon, who scripted the smash-hit sci-fi comedy "Men in Black," a comic-based movie.

"X-Men" has the basic building blocks a movie needs to make it to the silver screen: Simple things like the aforementioned script and a director—in this case, Bryan Singer, who directed the intense, twisting whodunit "The Usual Suspects." Besides not having a cast yet, the only hurdle yet to clear? Scheduling. "The only real thing holding up shooting is the decision on timing of the release," says Lee, "and unfortunately, that's not my decision." That decision is to be made by 20th Century Fox, the company distributing the movie. And pending that decision, "X-Men" could be appearing at a theater near you soon.

Then on the other hand, there's the "Spider-Man" movie. "Everyone wants to get their hands on it," says Lee. "It's envisioned as a much bigger project than even 'X-Men.' But there are still legal entanglements that can't be resolved." Those entanglements started when Carolco, the company that had bought the rights to a "Spider-Man" movie, went bankrupt. From there, chaos ensued. MGM Studios has thrown its hat in the ring as a potential "Spider-Man" studio. James Cameron, the man behind the "Terminator" films, has written a 50-page treatment for a Spidey movie. But the rights are still tied up in court. "If a lot of things go incredibly and suddenly well, 'Spider-Man' could be on the horizon," Lee says. "I certainly hope it can be resolved, but I don't know when it can be resolved." In the meantime, a cinematic "Spider-Man" remains just a dream. Don't count on it anytime soon.

CAN AWESOME ENTERTAINMENT SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOME THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING ROB LIEFELD?

LIKE HIM OR NOT, Rob Liefeld's Awesome Entertainment will survive regardless of any controversy surrounding him.

"This isn't all my show anymore," says Liefeld of his latest venture. "That's why I brought in Jeph [Loeb] to be my partner. The biggest difference between Awesome and Extreme Studios is I've surrounded myself with more seasoned veterans and already-established young artists, so the focus isn't all about me."

Through luring top-notch, young talent to its ranks, Awesome Entertainment is one of the quickest-rising comic companies in the industry right now. "For a company that's only three months old, we have signed a large talent pool," says Awesome publisher Jeph Loeb. "That's what is going to make our company survive resoundingly."

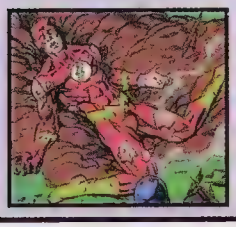
to E. coli bacteria outbreak in world's largest-ever meat recall

27 Norman Osborn returns from the grave (again) in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #250

31 Diana, Princess of Wales, dies in tragic car accident in Paris

SEPTEMBER

4 Grant Morrison takes on *The Flash*—and cripples the hero—with #130 (below); new penciler Ladronn jumps onto *Cable* with #48



5 Planet Comics retailers plead guilty to trafficking in obscenity and receive a deferred sentence

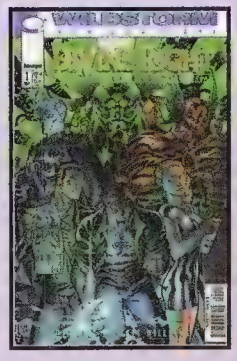
9 Emmy-winning actor Burgess Meredith (Penguin on 1960s "Batman" TV show) dies

16 Marvel saves itself from going outta business by paying $385 million in debts and selling its sticker company, Panini

17 *X-Men* #69's "Zero Tolerance" conclusion has Iceman defeating Bastion (for now); 13th "Heroes Reborn" issues start with *Fantastic Four*

24 Darkseid conquers Earth in *JLA* #12; Wonder Woman dies, then becomes the God-dess of Truth in *Wonder Woman* #127; *New Mutants* #1 reunites team; Jim Lee's newest techno-fantasy title *Divine Right: The Adventures of Max Faraday* begins

25 "ER" is broadcast live, becomes most-watched sea-

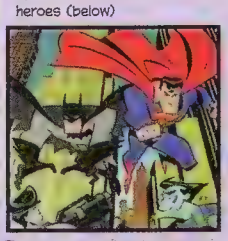


son premiere in TV history; sportscaster Marv Albert pleads guilty to assault and battery of a Virginia woman, and is fired from NBC Sports

OCTOBER

1 DC's alternate universe is unveiled with Tangent Comics

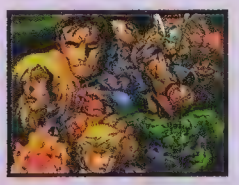
4 Special long-awaited "Batman/Superman Adventures" episode teams up the two heroes (below)



8 *Heroes Reborn: The Return* #1 sets out to return Marvel's core heroes to the Marvel Universe (right)

15 *X-Men* #70 begins writer Joe Kelly's run

22 *Batman: The Long Halloween* #13 reveals Holiday's identity (*Wizard* staff completely baffled); "Family Ties," Darkness/Witchblade crossover, starts with *Witchblade* #18



24 Marv Albert sentenced to one year's probation

26 Florida Marlins win World Series in exciting seventh game

29 Gambit's trial in *Uncanny X-Men* #350 signals artist Joe Madureira's last issue

NOVEMBER

2 "X-Files" fifth-season premiere

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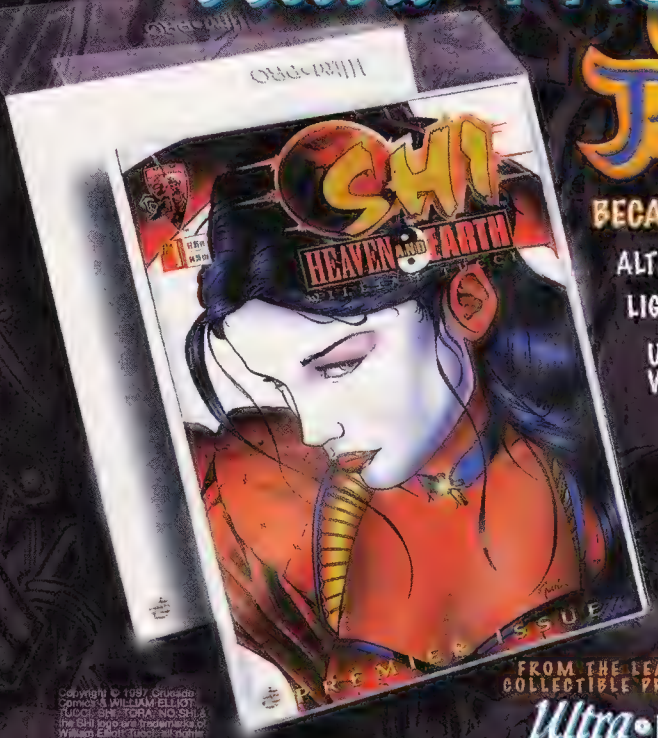

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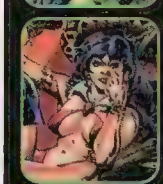

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WIZARD WIRE

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WIZARD WORLD ON AMERICA ONLINE. KEYWORD: WIZARD.

In addition to Liefeld and established writing veteran Loeb, Awesome Entertainment has showcased the writing talents of award-winner Alan Moore and lured artistic talents from some of Marvel's plum assignments, such as Steve Skroce (*Amazing Spider-Man*), Ian Churchill (*Cable, Avengers*), Jeff Matsuda (*X-Force*) and Ed McGuinness (*Deadpool*). And the talent pool continues to grow amidst rumors that John Arcudi (*The Mask*) and another to-be-announced big-name writer are in negotiations to write for Awesome in 1998. "I think that with enough talent that they've been recruiting, sure they'll survive," says writer Mark Waid. "And with original stories, they'll even do okay."

Despite the positive outlook, Awesome Entertainment still needs to overcome the shadow of controversy that looms over Liefeld, the founder and president of Awesome Entertainment.

In this past year alone, Liefeld was involved with the controversial "Heroes Reborn" deal, the Marvel publishing plan that gave former Marvel artists Liefeld and Jim Lee control of *Avengers, Captain America, Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man*. Initially, the decision to give Liefeld creative control met with a mixed fan reaction. But after the books were released, sales increased significantly and it seemed that "Heroes Reborn" was, at the very least, a financial success. However, after six issues—amidst rumors and allegations of missed deadlines and contract disputes—Marvel canceled the agreement with Liefeld, citing low sales. Lee then got the go-ahead to finish Liefeld's portion.

Also plaguing Liefeld this past year was the settlement of a lawsuit with Image Comics concerning his split with his former company. Yet another Liefeld lawsuit put him head-to-head with Marvel Comics over the design similarity between Marvel's Captain America and Awesome Entertainment's Fighting American. With all this baggage, can Liefeld continue to prosper in the comic industry? "The year of my being controversial has passed us by," he says. "I battled nuclear missiles this last year, and I think I'm pretty damn-near invulnerable."

And Liefeld may be correct.

Awesome Entertainment has proven it's a contender. As sales on its books continue to grow and more talent flocks to the company, look for Awesome to not only live on, but thrive in '98.

WHERE'S JIM SHOOTER?

DON'T EXPECT to see his name in a comic book credit box anytime soon.

"I'm doing a variety of writing, practically none of it for comics," Shooter says. "I'm primarily doing developments for major motion pictures at Saban Entertainment. All new properties. Nothing you would have heard from."

Jim Shooter himself has not been heard from in several years, but carries quite a comics résumé. He was writing DC Comics' *Legion of Super-Heroes* at—Get this!—age 13. He was the editor-in-chief at Marvel Comics from 1978-87, overseeing what some consider a golden age in the company's history. He helped found Valiant (now Acclaim) Comics in 1990 and saw the company off to a strong start.

But after a string of successes, Shooter was plagued by an equal string of failures. He was forced out of Valiant in 1993, and founded Defiant Comics. Defiant went out of business inside of two years. From there, he launched Broadway Comics, which closed its doors after one year.

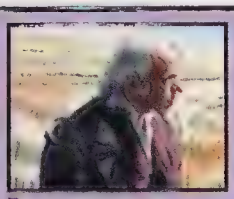
Shooter has landed on his feet so many times and has been able to find financial backers so often that it seems inevitable that he'll resurface again. His name still carries tremendous weight in the field, and he has been rumored to have been looking into buying Marvel Comics recently. But finally, he may be done with comics.

"With luck, I'm now a screenwriter," he says. "I was looking into buying Marvel for a while. I have banking connections, and I can raise money. But that hunt is over. Their financial situation is better and there's no sign they'll be up for sale. If anything on that front sounds interesting down the line, though, I may have a go at it."

In the meantime, Shooter is plugging away at movies and one small comic project. "Jim Starlin [*Warlock* writer/artist] called and remarked that we'd never done a book together. So we sent in a *Gen13 Bootleg* proposal he had in mind to WildStorm. I don't even know what happened to it."

Bootleg editor Scott Dunbier confirms that WildStorm got the proposal and says that, "As far as I'm concerned, it's a go." It should see publication in late 1998. Will that possibly lead to more Shooter-penned comics? "I'm not pursuing it," Shooter says. "If a publisher is interested, they know where I live." W

Wizard staff writers Jim McLauchlin and Matthew Senreich know the truth is out there. And they don't need no crummy TV show on Fox to prove it.



5 Alex Ross' two-issue "rant on America," *Uncle Sam*, debuts (above); *JLA: Paradise Lost* #1; *Nightwing* #16 intros Nightwing-mobile; Mr. Mxyzptlk dies in *Superman: The Man of Steel* #75; Scott Lobdell and Alan Davis explore the new *Fantastic Four* #1

7 "Starship Troopers" explodes into theaters (below)

12 *JLA: Year One* #1 spotlights the first year of the superteam; *Batman* #550 introduces new DC heroine Cameron Chase (starring in her own series *Chase* in December); *Vertigo: Winter's Edge* anthology presents new Endless story by Neil Gaiman; Grant Morrison, Mark Millar and Amanda Conner's *Vampirella: Ascending Evil* #1 launches new series

19 Mark Waid and Ron Garney return to *Captain America* with #1

26 *Legion of Super-Heroes* #100 brings time-lost Legionnaires back to 30th century; future Superman introduced in *JLA* #14; "Alien Resurrection" hits theaters

DECEMBER
(if all goes as planned)

3 *Birds of Prey: Batgirl* #1 brings back Batgirl; second *Generation X/Gen13* crossover; *Cerebus* #225 marks the title's 20th anniversary

10 *Superman Red/Superman Blue* one-shot (above); new *Iron Man* #1; *Gen13* #25 intros new creative team, John Arcudi and Gary Frank

17 Brand-new *Avengers* #1 by Kurt Busiek and George Pérez recaptures the team's former glory

31 The year ends in darkness: DC's eight "New Year's Evil" books, including the debut of future heavyweight villains Gog and Prometheus ■

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Basic Training

this month's host: George Pérez

How to Draw Large Group Shots

Hi, class! When *Wizard* asked me to host one of these "Basic Training" articles, I was told they had me specifically in mind for this lesson. After more than 23 years in this business, I knew what that meant. For better or worse, my main claim to fame is drawing group books. Seldom happy with just getting a half-dozen characters on a page, I'm the type who likes to get as many as he can elbowing for attention. Some say I'm crazy, others say I'm insane. And they're all correct. Now it's time for me to pass that insanity on to you.

Al Ortega

Until I put this article together, I never realized that there's actually some method to my madness—certain basic principles I follow which might help a novice artist deal with that unfeeling writer or editor who asks for that dreaded "big shot with everybody in it." Warning: Once you've proven you can do it once, you'll be asked to do it again. And again. And again.

Welcome to the asylum.

STEP ONE: A Cast of Thousands

Actually, it's only 25. Before I start laying out a group shot, I make a list of the characters I'm going to use, so I can then check them off as I draw them. The characters are usually determined by the script, so picking and choosing is generally not an option. However, since I've just returned to *The Avengers* (Unabashed self-promotion here!), the guys at *Wizard* figured Earth's Mightiest Heroes would do nicely. Thus, the cast is set.

1. Beast
2. Black Knight (on winged horse)
3. Black Panther
4. Black Widow
5. Captain America
6. Crystal
7. Falcon (with Redwing)
8. Giant-Man
9. Hawkeye
10. Hercules
11. Hulk
12. Iron Man
13. Machine Man
14. Magdalene
15. Photon
16. Quicksilver
17. Rage
18. Sandman
19. Sersi
20. Scarlet Witch
21. She-Hulk
22. Stingray
23. Thor
24. Vision
25. Wasp

STEP TWO: Group Dynamics

First off, just as there's no one way to draw a character, there are many ways of drawing a large group (not counting covers, which is a whole other ballgame). Most of the time, that decision is dictated by the script. In my career I've found that group shots fall into three major categories:

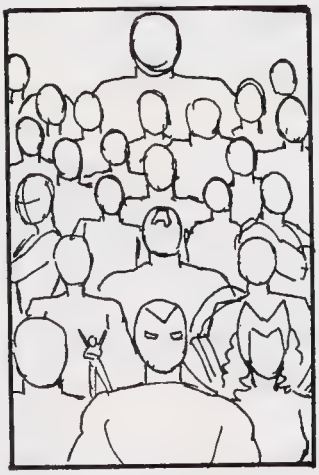
The Gathering

Here, the characters are usually in some large room, either talking to each other or reacting to their surroundings. For the sake of this article, I'm skipping backgrounds altogether. A major difference with this type of layout compared to the others is you have the option of turning characters *away* from the reader. In the case of characters with capes, that's a way to avoid drawing all the detail on a character or two. Just be aware of the comparative sizes of the characters.

The Portrait

Usually requested for a splash page, this style shows the characters standing in appropriate postures as they look directly at the reader. Sometimes this portrait consists merely of head shots. The layout I've drawn here is somewhere in between.

THE GATHERING

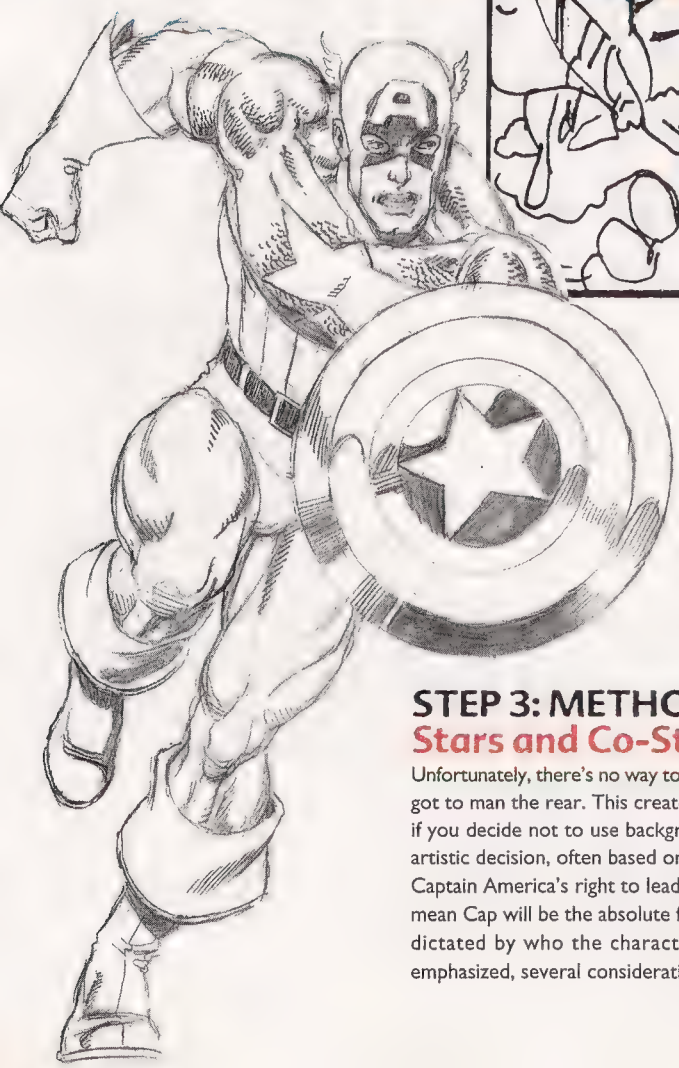


THE PORTRAIT

The Action Shot

This one's got superheroes doing what they do best! They could be charging at the reader, ready for battle, while some use their powers to indicate that an enemy's just out of page range. They could be running at the reader in the same direction, or be in the midst of battle with enemies all around. For the sake of this lesson (and since drawing *two* groups battling is a bit much for now), we'll concentrate on the Battle Charge because it utilizes many elements common to all the group shots.

NOTE: Since we read from left to right, there's a sort of bias that establishes the right as the direction of advancement. Having the characters running toward the left seems to imply retreat—unless you've already established that's where the menace is located. While the characters are running straight at the reader, I can still direct them slightly to the right through small turns in their bodies and heads.



STEP 3: METHOD TO THE MADNESS

Stars and Co-Stars

Unfortunately, there's no way to give equal time to everyone in a group shot—somebody's got to man the rear. This creates a sense of depth and perspective, which is very useful if you decide not to use backgrounds. Choosing which characters will be in front is an artistic decision, often based on the popularity of certain characters, but few will argue Captain America's right to lead an Avengers charge. However, that doesn't necessarily mean Cap will be the absolute front-most Avenger. Character positioning is sometimes dictated by who the characters are and what they do. In choosing who will be emphasized, several considerations need to be made.

Size DOES Matter

As I said earlier, size relationships should always be kept in mind. Usually, larger characters are pushed further back, while smaller ones are in the foreground. However, make sure that relationships remain clear. Let's take the two size extremes: Giant-Man and the Wasp. Notice how Giant-Man, Iron Man, Scarlet Witch and The Wasp would look standing on the same horizon line, but *without* any perspective lines or backgrounds to indicate how far they are from each other. Without that scale, Giant-Man and Iron Man seem to be the same height, while the Wasp appears as tall as the Scarlet Witch. Then add perspective lines, and the illusion's exposed.

If we drew Giant-Man taller in the first place, though, there'd be no such illusion. So, to maintain Giant-Man's sense of height, always draw him bigger than any other character, regardless of where he is in the picture. Conversely, overlapping the tiny Wasp in front of any larger foreground character fully establishes how tiny she is.

NOTE: Speaking of overlapping, try not to have characters butting elbows with each other, since that might fool the reader into thinking they're standing side by side, rather than on different planes of depth. Overlapping definitely solves the problem of who's in front of whom.

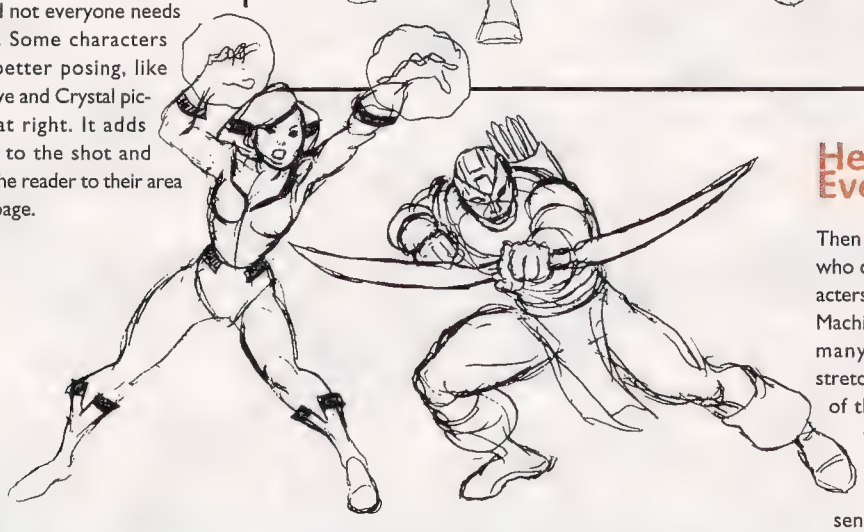
Frequent Flyers

Since we've got a vertical space to fill, we should decide which guys and gals are on the top and who's on the bottom. (Get yer minds outta the gutter, class.) The top is easy: To be in the sky, ya gotta fly—although leaping characters like the Hulk and the Beast also fit in this category. Flying characters are useful, since they can be drawn in deep perspective, so all you really need to draw is the character's upper body. This can save quite a bit of space.

Ground Control

The lower half of the page is usually where the non-flying members are relegated. Primarily, they're runners, but all runners aren't created equal—no two characters should run exactly the same way. Speedsters like Quicksilver would seldom be at the rear of a charge, although we have to slow him down so he doesn't run out of the frame.

And not everyone needs to run. Some characters work better posing, like Hawkeye and Crystal pictured at right. It adds variety to the shot and draws the reader to their area of the page.



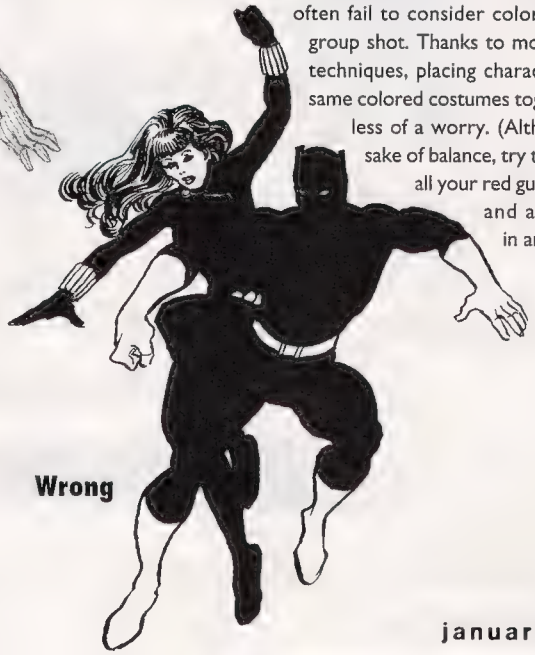
Here, There and Everywhere

Then there are those characters who can have it both ways. Characters with expansive abilities, like Machine Man, could actually be in many places at once just by stretching out over various points of the illustration. (Check out the finished piece on page 138 to see what I mean.) Gimmicks like this bring a sense of design and unity to a group shot.

Black + Black = Black

Be careful to keep characters clear. Drawing two black-suited characters overlapping each other makes it hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. If you're not sure who will be inking the piece, you may be asking for trouble. Either avoid the problem, or make it easier by throwing some highlights on the outlines of the conflicting characters (as I've done in the example on the left). And since we're drawing in black and white, pencilers often fail to consider color's effect on a group shot. Thanks to modern coloring techniques, placing characters with the same colored costumes together is much less of a worry. (Although, for the sake of balance, try to avoid having all your red guys in one place and all your blues in another.)

Right



Wrong

STEP FOUR: Avengers Assembled!

On the finished piece at left, you can see many of the principles I outlined earlier. However, with so many characters doing so many things, even an old pro like myself still makes mistakes. The important thing is to keep the piece interesting and dynamic. For that to work, composing a group shot should be an organic process, with the picture changing as you go along to take care of problems you didn't consider in your original thumbnail sketch. Some examples:

a) I moved Cap's shield closer into his body and made him run straight toward the reader (a change from the original image I showed in Step 3). This allowed more of She-Hulk to be seen.

b) I changed Sandman's left hand to a fist because the open hand looked too much like the Hulk's. I also "pulverized" Sandman's other hand (bottom left) so as not to distract from Wanda.

c) I changed Hawkeye's bow to a vertical position so I wouldn't block off Crystal.

d) I added a stinger blast effect for the Wasp to throw something at the reader. A blast from a larger character would obscure too much of the drawing.

e) I removed the energy effects on Iron Man's fists so that Giant-Man's face is clear.

f) I changed the Falcon's posture so it wouldn't look the same as that of the Vision and Stingray.

g) I added Redwing (the Falcon's falcon) because I didn't know where I'd put him until the drawing was finished.

h) I changed Black Widow so that Natasha could be holding on to Machine Man's arm.

i) Because of the immense amount of space the Black Knight and his winged horse would take, he had to be put far into the rear. Now he looks about the same size as the Wasp, but all the overlapping of characters keeps the size ratio clear.

j) In the "peekaboo" spots, areas where I'm basically just trying to fit parts of characters in when there's no room for full figures, I try to use characters who can be identified even without their full costumes being revealed. In the case of Sersi, I used her glowing eyes to easily identify her.

Well, there you have it. Those are just a few notes on how I do group shots—your mileage may vary. There is one thing I didn't mention yet, however. As I said, *Wizard* only asked me to put together a primer on drawing a group shot, not a group COVER. Imagine having to do this—*and* leaving room for the logo and UPC box? The padded room awaits. **W**

George Pérez's amazing ability to throw way too many characters on one page, and somehow make 'em all fit, can be seen monthly in the pages of Marvel's Avengers, *as well as his creator-owned* Crimson Plague *put out quarterly by Event Comics.*

JUNK DRAWER

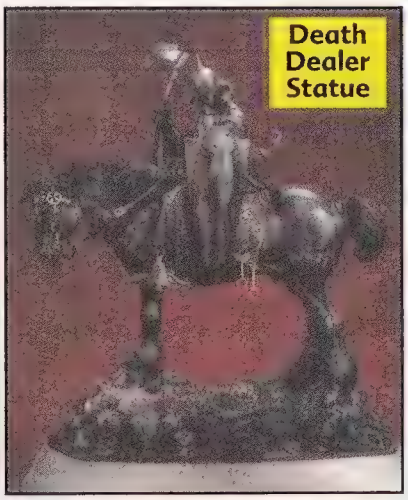
Little bits of everything in the world of comic-related merchandise

By David Borak and the *Wizard* Staff

Just in time for the holiday season, *Wizard* brings you the latest in cool, comics-related merchandise. Perhaps one of these fine items will be just what the comic fanatic in your life has always wanted. So, if the Sharper Image is all outta life-size Stormtroopers, try these on for size. And as always, check your local comic specialty shop for availability.

A DEATHLY STATUE

Now here's a statue to die for! Artist Frank Frazetta, sculptor Randy Bowen, Dark Horse Comics and Bowen Designs have teamed-up to produce a fully painted, cold-cast porcelain version of their bronze Death Dealer Statue. Based on the famous Frazetta painting from the '70s, the statue rests on a wooden display base, is limited to 5,000 copies and hits comics stores this December for $250.

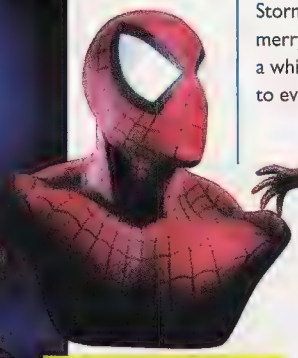


Death Dealer Statue

SPIDEY'S BUSTIN' OUT

Coming in December, keep an eye out for two busts of everyone's favorite web-slinger, Spider-Man. First, Legends in 3 Dimensions brings you a pre-painted, cold-cast porcelain bust of Spidey ($169) that stands 10 inches tall and is limited to just 3,000 pieces. Look for it in a specialty comic shop near you.

Next, Bowen Designs provides collectors with an even more limited (and even more expensive) bronze Spidey. The Spider-Man Bronze ($2,500) is limited to just 100 castings. Best of all, though, the first 35 collectors to reserve their bronzes will receive as a premium, a cold-cast bronze bust depicting Spidey's alter ego, Peter Parker! Call Bowen Designs at (503) 786-0542 to reserve your bronze statue today!



Spidey Porcelain Bust (above) and Bronze Statue

A STORMY CHRISTMAS

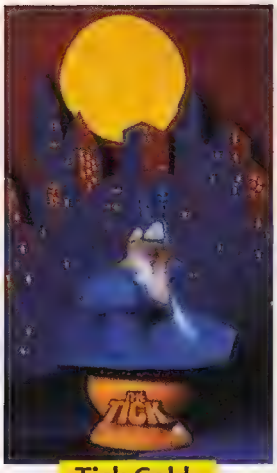
When it's time to decorate the tree, do it X-Men style with Creative License's Storm porcelain ornament ($30). Shipping in December, the 6-inch wide, pre-painted ornament shows Storm flying on her merry way to bring a white Christmas to everyone.

Storm Porcelain Ornament

Hellboy Statue

A STATUESQUE HELLBOY

Direct from France, Mondes Imaginaires brings you a limited-edition, fully painted statue of Mike Mignola's Hellboy. The Hellboy resin statue ($325) stands over 11 inches tall and is part of a limited-edition of just 550 statues worldwide. Fully authorized by Mignola, these detailed babies are sculpted by some French guy named André Jaume. Look for it this December.



Tick Cold-Cast Bust

Product of the Month

PSYLOCKE IN PORCELAIN

Coming in December, Creative License brings you the Psylocke in the Danger Room Porcelain Statue ($175), depicting the X-Men's femme fatale captured in the metallic grip of the Danger Room's robotic tentacles! A companion piece to the previously released Bishop Statue, each Psylocke piece measures 9" X 10" X 5.5" and comes signed and numbered with a certificate of authenticity.

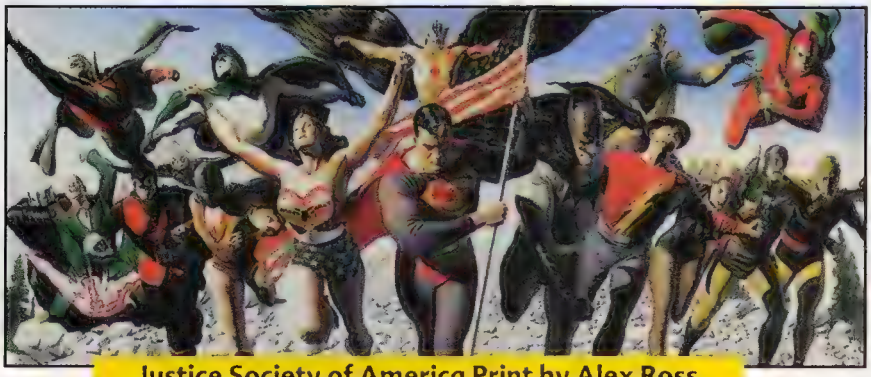
HEADS UP FOR THE TICK

Starting in December, you can display the grinning noggin of your favorite arachnid defender with the Tick Cold-Cast Bust ($100) from Legends in 3 Dimensions. The 8 1/2-inch bust, limited to just 2,500 pieces, comes packaged in an illustrated collector's box with a signed and numbered certificate of authenticity.

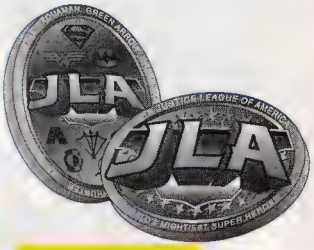
A WARNER WINTER

Warner Bros. Studio Stores are serving up a big plate of holiday cheer. First up is The Justice Society of America: The Golden Age Limited-Edition Print ($400). Limited to just 500 copies, this ?? X ?? X ?? print features 16 heroes from the Justice Society (including Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman) as painted by artist supreme Alex Ross. Next up is the Origin of Green Lantern Lithograph ($300) by Gil Kane. Limited to 500 copies .this puppy measures 30" X 23", shows how GL received his power ring and depicts the character's evolution across the bottom. Also check out the World's Finest Limited-Edition Cel ($475), which measures 24" X 19" and shows Batman and Superman cruising over Metropolis' skyline. Finally, Batman and Catwoman grace the face of the Almost Got 'Im Limited-Edition 3-D Plate. Inspired by the "Adventures of Batman and Robin," the plate ($55) is limited to 2,500 copies. All of these items are currently on sale at a Warner Bros. Studio Store near you.

Batman & Catwoman 3-D Plate



Justice Society of America Print by Alex Ross



JLA Paperweight

PAPERWEIGHT OF JUSTICE

Keep your papers in line this December with the JLA Pewter Paperweight ($39.95). This 3/8-inch thick 3 1/2-inch diameter pewter paperweight features the JLA logo on one side and the emblems of the individual members on the other.

MERRY MAXX-MAS

Sam Kieth's The Maxx is ready to spread some Christmas cheer with a ready-to-dangle Christmas ornament ($19.95). Sculpted by Clayburn Moore, it features the Maxx scrambling to safety with a pesky Isz

hanging off his giant foot. Fully painted, this limited-edition ornament measures approximately 4 inches in length and should be hitting specialty comic book stores around Christmastime.

BATMAN: BLACK OR WHITE?

Choose your colors this December with the Batman: Black and White T-shirt ($15.95) from DC Comics, featuring Frank Miller's cover piece from *Batman: Black and White* #2. The 100 percent cotton T-shirt features the striking image of the Dark Knight in either black on a white background or white on a black background.

ASTRO VIDEO

Madman creator Mike Allred's full-length, sci-fi, independent feature "Astroesque" is finally available on video. Written, produced and directed on a shoe-string budget by Allred, "Astroesque" ($19.98) features the original Red Rocket in wide-screen, letterboxed format. This film stands on its own, but connects cleverly to Dark Horse's *Red Rocket 7* comic book series and an upcoming album by Allred's rock band, GEAR! "Astroesque" goes on sale January 21 in specialty comic and video stores everywhere.

Batman T-Shirts

Check your local stores for availability of all these funky-fresh products. Or ask your friendly neighborhood comic store to special order 'em for ya!

HEY! Are you a company putting out some super-groovy good fun in the form of comic-related merchandise like Martian Manhunter's hit single, "It's Not Easy Being Green," Spawn's Face-Restorer and G.I. Joe's *Places to Go, People to Kill*? If so, we'd love to include 'em in our equally super-groovy "Junk Drawer" column. (Of course, we'd also like statues, T-shirts, novelties, magnets, etc.) Please send all info and sample products to:

Junk Drawer
151 Wells Ave.
Congers, NY 10920

JUNK DRAWER video games

By Steve Brown and the *Wizard* staff

AN X-TREME 'QUAKE' FOR THE NEW YEAR

Happy Holidays, friends. If you've been bad, expect to receive naught but coal for a present. If you're good, you might get socks or underwear. If you've been *very* good, make sure you ask for *X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse*. Even though the game won't be out until the new year, just the thought of its enough to warm our fuzzy little hearts. The folks at Marvel Interactive are making the holidays a lot merrier with their new offering which lets players shoot the living hell out of Marvel's favorite mutants. Marvel Interactive sent us a beta version of this very interesting, very crowd-pleasing game. We found it to be, well…read on, True Believer.

X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse

MANUFACTURER: GT Interactive
PLATFORM: PC CD-ROM
SUGGESTED RETAIL: $49.99, available early 1998

This maze is dark, dingy and filled with X-Men. The only thing they want is blood. The only thing that can stop them is cold, hard bullets. Welcome to *X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse*, a new patch for PCs (Windows or DOS 5.0) by GT Interactive.

X-Men is the first *Quake* total conversion, a patch that turns *Quake* into an X-Men adventure. To play the patch, users will first need to buy a copy of the first-person maze shooter *Quake* (shareware versions or pirated copies won't run this patch).

The patch changes *Quake* into a new version of the old game. Instead of running through a series of mazes shooting at killer dogs, evil knights and man-eating fish, *Ravages* allows a player to run, jump and swim through mazes while blasting away at X-Men… or at least evil clones of the X-Men. Users can play solo or against their friends. In one-player mode, users play the part of Magneto's cybernetic pawn, out to destroy the X-clones before Apocalypse rules the world. In the game's multi-player feature, users can

X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse

X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse

play as an X-Man, using mutant powers to waste their friends (also playing as X-Men) in a deathmatch to end all deathmatches.

Ravages' plot is simple: the despotic Apocalypse has cloned an army of X-Men and plans to take over the world. He's cloned 12 deadly X-Men (Archangel, Bishop, Beast, Cannonball, Cyclops, Gambit, Iceman, Phoenix, Psylocke, Rogue, Storm and Wolverine) and set them loose. Each X-Man has his own unique attack style, powers and weapons. Archangel's wings shoot metal projectiles and protect his body from flak; Cyclops fires deadly optic blasts that can hit a player straight on or tag a player when they ricochet; Iceman blasts his foes with shards of frozen water; Psylocke uses her ninja powers and psychic dagger to decimate her foes and so on.

The ultimate goal is to destroy the evil Apocalypse, but before that can be done, users will have to explore every level. That's because each level has a component of a weapon hidden somewhere. This weapon, when assembled, will help you kill Apocalypse. Luckily, the game gives players a wide selection of weapons to use against their foes, from the weak-ass "Power Fist" to the incredibly powerful "Nuclear Energy Radiation Dispatcher" (N.E.R.D.). Along with new weapons, there are new powerups too. Our personal favorite is the Ruby of Cyttorak (the gem that gave Juggernaut his powers), which gives players temporary invulnerability but, sadly, not the ability to stomp the juice out of any foe.

The little touches in this patch make the game highly enjoyable. Both Magneto and Gateway, mutants who appear in X-Men comics, make cameo appearances. The game starts players off in Professor Xavier's mansion, asking them to find the way out...or die trying.

While the action in *Quake* is frenzied, *Ravages*' is fever-inducing. Players will find themselves racing through the game's mazes, desperately searching for weapons to rid themselves of the hated clones. Fighting the X-Men, players will have to learn how to adapt the clones' peculiarities and invulnerabilities. Attack Bishop with an energy weapon and he'll absorb the blast. Wound Wolverine but leave him alive, and his healing power will restore him to full health in mere seconds.

As players travel through the mazes, they'll be struck by how good everything looks. There's little or no pixelation, and the character sprites are very impressive. Even Wolverine's killer grin, while a bit silly, is fairly disconcerting.

Ultimately, *Ravages* is a killer ride, definitely worth the trip. Heck, it might even be worth buying a copy of *Quake* for. It's going to be a happy, happy new year, filled with plenty of dead, bullet-riddled X-Men. W

IT'S YOUR MOVE
SPECIAL MOVES AND SECRET CODES

DOOM64 for Nintendo 64

• FEATURES MENU

This code gives players access to the game's "Features Menu," which offers users a host of cool goodies like "God Mode" and the ability to warp to any level they want.

1) Go to the password screen and enter the following code:

?TJLBDFWBFGVJVVB

The features menu will appear on the options screen. Access this menu and select the appropriate features.

• WARP TO THE FINAL LEVEL

This code moves a player directly to the game's final level, with his character fully armed and equipped.

1) Go to the password screen and enter the following code:

W93M7H2OBCYOPSVB

JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II for the PC

Check out these nifty gameplay tips for LucasArts' hot *Dark Forces II*.

• When opening a door to a new space, be prepared to move back and let the door close. If enemies are in the room/area, the open door will reveal your presence to them. When the door closes, the enemies will move towards your last known position. Move away from the door and wait in ambush.

• Search everywhere for hidden powerups. Explore ledges and holes; look under ramps and elevators.

• Don't let yourself be drawn *between* two enemies. Instead, keep your back to a wall, especially when fighting with the lightsaber.

• Try using Force Pull to bring objects to you. If the object doesn't quite reach you, immediately use Force Pull to pull it again—the object will get closer. It works especially well if you're above the item.

• Kyle has different attacks with the lightsaber. Primary fire (shoot button) while moving forward is a quick, three-stroke attack. Primary while side-stepping is a sideways chop. Primary while backing away is an uppercut-type swing.

• In multiplayer mode, if an opponent has the Rail Detonator, is at close range and hits you with the secondary fire option (i.e. the detonator sticks to you and starts hissing), the best thing to do is charge your opponent. Hopefully, he'll get caught in the explosion as well.

• Charging an opponent in possession of the Concussion Rifle has advantages as well. At range, an opponent with the Concussion Rifle possesses devastating firepower. In close, however, he's at a disadvantage to almost every other weapon. While powerful, the secondary fire option on the Concussion Rifle is slow to reload. Charge your opponent and use the sidestep to avoid face-to-face contact. The lightsaber or Stormtrooper Rifle will have the advantage in close quarters.

Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II

SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA 'WING IT!

NIGHTWING™

Nightwing, Batman's ex-partner and headliner of one of DC's hottest new books, stars in this historic first-ever comics event! **Exclusive to *Wizard***, you can only get the ***Nightwing* # 1/2** through this special offer from **DC Comics** and ***Wizard***. Just fill out the order form, mail the three bucks and wait for **Nightwing** to swing into your life.

With *Nightwing* #1/2, you'll get the goods:

- **A brand-new Nightwing story written by Batman super-scribe Chuck Dixon and drawn by fan-faves Scott McDaniel & Karl Story!**
- **Nightwing, the star of one of DC's coolest books, alone in Gotham's ugly-sister city, Blüdhaven, in an all-new story!**
- **The Nightwing Sketchbook. Featuring a rare behind-the-scenes look at how this DC Comic makes it into your greedy little hands.**
- **And the most kickin' part of all...this is a Nightwing story you won't find anywhere else! This exclusive comic is available through this one-time *Wizard* offer only!**

This dynamic deal is only for a limited time! Don't delay!

LEGAL HAVEN

No reproductions of this coupon will be accepted. This coupon must be sent in the accompanying envelope, one coupon per comic. You may put additional coupons in the same envelope. Remit by check or money order only. Canadian orders remit $4.00, other foreign orders remit $6.00. All payment must be in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank. Make all checks payable to Wizard Press. Offer good only while supply lasts. Please allow eight-to-12 weeks for delivery. Changes of address will not be forwarded unless Wizard Press is notified in writing by February 13, 1998. Nightwing, DC Bullet and all related elements ™ & © 1997 DC Comics. All rights reserved.

THIS OFFER EXPIRES FEBRUARY 13, 1998.

Sony Computer Entertainment America Presents:

The Ultimate Battle!

COOL!

PlayStation

BUSHIDO BLADE™

Armored Core™

CARDINAL SYN™

Three of the hottest new games for your PlayStation™ game console are *Bushido Blade*™, Square Soft's innovative 3-D swordfighting game; *Armored Core*™, a 3-D arcade shoot 'em-up; and *Cardinal Syn*™, a 3-D arcade-style fantasy fighting game. What? You don't have a PlayStation game console? Well, fill out the coupon below and you might just win one—and a bunch of other prizes, too!

This month's contest is sponsored by Sony Computer Entertainment America. It's like a real-life Stark Enterprises. Neat, huh?

SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

www.playstation.com

The Long Legalese

1. No purchase necessary. To enter: fill out attached entry form or send a postcard with your name, age, sex, address, phone number and your answers to the following questions: 1) Do you own a PlayStation game console? and 2) How many PlayStation games do you intend to purchase this year? Send the postcard to "WIZARD-SCEA" Sweepstakes, c/o Linzee International, 1306 Old County Road, Belmont, CA 94002. Entries must be received no later than January 30, 1998. Sony Computer Entertainment America (the "Sponsor") is not responsible for lost, late, mutilated, illegible, incomplete or misdirected entries. 2. Prizes: One (1) Grand Prize winner will receive a PlayStation game console, ten (10) software titles (including Bushido Blade, Armored Core, and Cardinal Syn—all other games determined solely at SCEA's discretion) and a one (1) year's subscription to PlayStation Underground CD Magazine (approximate retail value of $479.00). One (1) First Prize winner will receive one (1) PlayStation branded jacket and a one (1) year's subscription to PlayStation Underground CD Magazine (approximate retail value of $230.00). Five (5) Second Prize winners will each receive a one (1) year's subscription to PlayStation Underground CD Magazine and one (1) PlayStation branded T-shirt (approximate retail value of $50.00). Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prize of equal value if prize is unavailable. Prizes are non-transferable and no substitutions allowed. 3. Winners: Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries received by the Sponsor, whose decisions are final. Drawing will be held on or about February 17, 1998. Winners shall be notified by mail and/or telephone. 4. Odds of Winning Sweepstakes: The odds of winning depends on number of valid entries received. 5. Eligibility: Promotion open to residents of United States only. Return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within 7 days of receipt or forfeit prize. If the winner is a minor, then prize may be awarded to winner's parent or legal guardian. By acceptance of prize, winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Employees of the Sponsor and its parent and affiliated companies, Wizard Press and their families are not eligible. Neither the Sponsor nor its affiliates, subsidiaries, division or related companies or Wizard Press are responsible for any damages, taxes or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this sweepstakes or receipt of prize. 6. Winners list: To obtain list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Wizard-SCEA Sweepstakes Winners List, c/o Linzee International, 1306 Old County Road, Belmont, CA 94002. Requests for winners list must be received by March 6, 1998. Please allow four (4) weeks for delivery of winners list. 7. Restrictions: Void where prohibited or restricted by law.

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Grand Prize (1): One randomly picked winner gets his very own PlayStation game console, with 10 games which includes *Bushido Blade*, *Armored Core* and *Cardinal Syn*, and a one-year subscription to *PlayStation Underground CD Magazine*!

First Prize (1): This lucky winner walks away with a PlayStation jacket and a one-year subscription to *PlayStation Underground CD Magazine*!

Second Prize (5): Five more lucky winners each score a one-year subscription to *PlayStation Underground CD Magazine* and a PlayStation T-shirt!

Fill out this coupon (don't forget your phone number), put it in an envelope and send it to:
WIZARD-SCEA Sweepstakes, c/o Linzee International, 1306 Old County Road, Belmont, CA 94002.
Deadline is January 30, 1998.

The Ultimate Battle! Entry Form

DEADLINE IS JAN 30, 1998!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number (with area code) _____

Are you a boy or a girl? _____

Do you own a PlayStation? _____

How many PlayStation games do you intend to purchase this year? _____

THE TOY CHEST BY TOM PALMER JR.

STAR WARS... EVERYTHING STAR WARS

If you think you've seen everything from Kenner's Star Wars line, guess again. Kenner recently revealed some of its plans for early 1998, and it looks like another banner year for Star Wars fans. Just remember, what you see here is just the tip of the iceberg as far as next year's Star Wars offerings are concerned.

Leading off the Power of the Force 3 3/4-inch assortments is something fans have been drooling for: the never-before-seen **Darth Vader with Removable Helmet**. Whoo-hoo! He's joined by an Ewok two-pack (with Wicket and Logray), Biggs Darklighter (in his X-Wing pilot togs), Lak Sivrak (the Cantina's wolfman), Ishi Tib (a starfish-faced denizen of Jabba's palace), the Imperial Captain Piett and the bounty hunter Zuckuss. Kenner's also going back to a few old favorites with brand-new sculpt tweaks. Princess Leia (in her familiar white gown) gets a second go around with a brand-new likeness next year, as well as Luke Skywalker (this time with a Blast Shield Helmet and a less buff body), R2-D2 (with a datalink and periscope) and C-3P0 (with removable limbs).

Darth Vader with removable helmet

Lak Sivrak

BOXED SETS AND TWO-PACKS

Kenner will also follow up the success of this year's Cinema Scene Death Star Escape and Cantina Showdown three-Packs with two new boxed sets: Final Showdown and Purchase of the Droids, both of which feature brand-new sculpts and new characters. Final Showdown features new Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader figures, as well as the Emperor in his Death Star throne, while Purchase of the Droids comes with Luke, C-3P0 and the first-ever **Uncle Owen** figure.

Princess Leia is also the subject of a few multi-packs next year. Her highness teams up with a number of Star Wars buddies for some unique two-packs, including cloth costumes and partially rooted hair! The Princess Leia Collection will include different Leias paired with R2-D2, Wicket the Ewok, Bespin Han Solo and Ceremonial Luke Skywalker.

Final Showdown 3-Pack

Princess Leia multi-packs

VEHICLES

And there's no shortage of large-size vehicles for next year, either. The X-Wing gets a face lift, with a brand new sculpt and a few extra electronic features. With an appearance closer to its big-screen counterpart, the Power F/X X-Wing Fighter comes with Luke and R2-D2, and is packed with lights and sounds to recreate the entire Death Star trench battle from "Star Wars."

With the Star Wars: Expanded Universe line, Kenner hopes to bolster its offerings with some slightly altered versions of popular Star Wars vehicles that didn't see screen time. Look for familiar looking versions of vehicles and pilots like the Cloud Car, Speeder Bike and Air Speeder based on "Star Wars" conceptual sketches by Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston.

Power F/X X-Wing Fighter

Expanded Universe Cloud Car and Air Speeder

PLAYSETS

Kenner's also got a few new play and packaging concepts to spice up its Star Wars line next year. The Battle Station assortment includes new figures in projectile-firing cockpits like Luke Skywalker with Falcon Gunner Station, Han Solo with Falcon Gunner Station and Darth Vader in his TIE Fighter. In the Complete Galaxy line, look for 3 3/4-inch figures inside miniature planetary globes. Luke on Tatooine, Leia on Hoth, Darth Vader in the Death Star and Yoda on Dagobah launch this rather unique line. And with the Epic Force line, some Star Wars mainstays get a boost up to 5-inches. Look for this assortment, which includes all-new Bespin Luke, Darth Vader, Boba Fett and C-3PO, to feature figures posed in familiar movie stances on a rotating base within a window-box.

Epic Force Luke

Epic Force Darth Vader

Darth Vader in his TIE Fighter

Han Solo with Falcon Gunner Station

Luke in Tatooine globe

CREATURES

Quite a few fan-requested figures get a turn in Kenner's additions to the Creature assortments. The **Tauntaun** arrives with Luke Skywalker in Hoth Gear early next year, joined by the **Wampa** with Hoth Luke. And in the Deluxe Creature line, look for the first-ever **Bantha** (with a trusty Tusken Raider mount), and the **Rancor** with Luke Skywalker, complete with a bone for the Jedi to smash in its menacing mouth.

And as if that wasn't enough, Kenner also announced that it has secured the much-sought-after Star Wars prequel license to produce Star Wars toys, along with Galoob, well into the next century. What does this mean to *you* the toy consumer? It basically means one thing: more Star Wars toys than you can shake a dead Bantha at.

Tauntaun

TOY BIZ SERIOUSLY DELIVERS

Not to be left out, Toy Biz recently unveiled some of its new Marvel toys set to debut in '98. Fans are in for a ton of requested characters!

Never-seen-before heroes and villains are the name of the game for Toy Biz in the coming months. The Vault, Toy Biz's first all-villains line, will include popular baddies like **Ultron**, **Typhoid Mary** and Stegron the Dinosaur Man. Marvel's Most Wanted serves up a bunch of characters that fans have been clamoring for, including **X-Man**, **Blink** and a character to be named later.

The Biz also plans to revisit the Age of Apocalypse with Omega (AoA Omega Red) and an AOA Jean Grey. And in a funky retro twist, look for a **New Mutants** line featuring Illyana (Magik), Wolfsbane and Warlock!

Spider-Man's corner of the Marvel Universe is also joining in the fun. Look for characters like **Sandman**, **Silver Sable**, **Jack O'Lantern**, the **Red Skull**, **Madame Web** and an all-new Carnage and Hobgoblin in various Spider-Man assortments in the coming months.

Check back here next month for more pics of these awesome bad boys!

Age of Apocalypse Omega Red and Jean Grey

New Mutants (shown here in prototypes from left to right): Magik with Lockheed, Warlock and Wolfsbane

BATMAN LIVES!

DC's resident Dark Knight Detective is also out in full force next year, courtesy of a number of different action figure lines from Kenner.

On the animated front, look for the obligatory new Batman variations like Silver Defender Batman, Detective Batman, Jet Wing Batman, Road Rocket Batman and Undercover Batman. A Batman line wouldn't be complete without a supporting cast, so Kenner's also cooked-up Seawing Nightwing (name tentative), Crime Solver Nightwing, Battle Shield Nightwing and Crime Fighter Robin. And to make things interesting for Batman and his pals, Kenner's also got **Two-Face**, **Mad Hatter** and **Wild Card Joker**. But the most bizarre addition to the Batman line is the first-ever **Creeper** figure, based on his animated appearance from "The New Batman Adventures."

Over in Kenner's Legend of the Dark Knight line, look for Lava Fury Batman, Batgirl, Dark Knight Batman and **Clayface** in late summer and early fall, as well as a special Collector Series Bob Kane Batman.

Even though "Batman and Robin" didn't do so well at the box office, there are more movie-inspired Batman toys on the way in '98. Kenner's offering up a number of Batman variations like Ambush Attack Batman, Aerial Combat Batman and Thermal Cape Batman, as well as a few different Robins, like Aerial Defender Robin, Talon Strike Robin and Wing Blast Robin. Not to mention a Batman vs. Mr. Freeze two-pack, and a re-decoed Batman and Robin two-pack.

And next September, Kenner's got a top-secret Batman line planned that will hopefully mean good things for fans looking for more DC Universe characters. **W**

ToyFare *Assistant Editor Tom Palmer Jr. used to have a removable helmet, but he got too many complaints from his neighbors.*

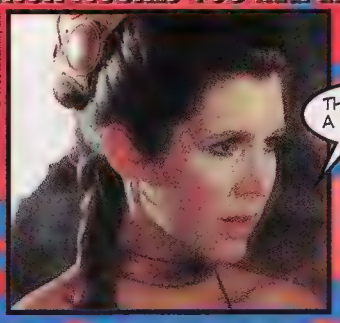
For the Top 10 best toys of 1997, turn the page. →

From left: Detective Batman (mistakenly minus his Bat-emblem), Crime Solver Nightwing and Crime Fighter Robin

The Mad Hatter (with sidekick robot)

WISH LIST

ACTION FIGURES YOU HELPED MAKE



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One of the most popular nibbits in this here "Toy Chest" column is "Wish List," the fan's opportunity to tell the bigwigs at the toy companies what figures you *really* want to see. And it looks like them toy makers have paid more and more attention to your pleas in the last year. Over 20 "Wish List" contenders have popped up in '97, and there's about half that number already planned for next year!

FIGURES THAT HAVE BEEN PRODUCED IN '97

- **Grand Moff Tarkin**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #55*
- **Tarantula**—Spider-Man: Spider Force (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #56*
- **Emperor Palpatine**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #57*
- **Wendigo**—Hulk: Outcasts (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #57*
- **Princess Leia as Jabba's Prisoner**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #58*
- **Molten Man**—*ToyFare* Exclusive (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #58*
- **Parallax**—Batman: Total Justice (Kenner)—*Wizard #60*
- **Onslaught**—X-Men: Onslaught (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #61*
- **"Mirror Mirror" Star Trek**—Playmates—*Wizard #62*
- **Thor**—Avengers (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #62*
- **Wedge**—Star Wars: POTF Millennium Falcon Collector's Case (Kenner)—*Wizard #62*
- **Jean Grey**—X-Men: Onslaught (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #62*
- **Classic X-Men Boxed Set** (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #62*
- **Universal Monsters** (Hasbro New Ventures)—*Wizard #63*
- **Garindan**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #64*
- **Snowtrooper**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Rebel Fleet Trooper**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Jabba the Hutt**—Star Wars: POTF Creature Assortment (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Emperor's Royal Guard**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Bishop**—X-Men: Missile Flyers (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #67*
- **Shadowcat**—*ToyFare* Exclusive (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #67*
- **Joseph**—X-Men: Savage Land (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #68*

FIGURES THAT WILL BE SHOWING UP IN '98

- **Sandman**—Spider-Man (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #55*
- **Witchblade**—Witchblade (Moore Action Collectibles)—*Wizard #61*
- **X-Man**—Marvel's Most Wanted (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #61*
- **Jack O'Lantern**—Spider-Man (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #63*
- **Darth Vader with Removable Helmet**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Wampa**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #66*
- **Gen13**—WildStorm—*Wizard #68*
- **Blink**—Marvel's Most Wanted (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #68*
- **New X-Men Boxed Set** (Toy Biz)—*Wizard #70*
- **Biggs Darklighter**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #74*
- **Bantha**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #76*
- **Ewok Two-Pack**—Star Wars: POTF (Kenner)—*Wizard #76*

Hey! Keep sending them Top 10 lists! You've already made a difference! Drop us a note with your "dream figures" at:

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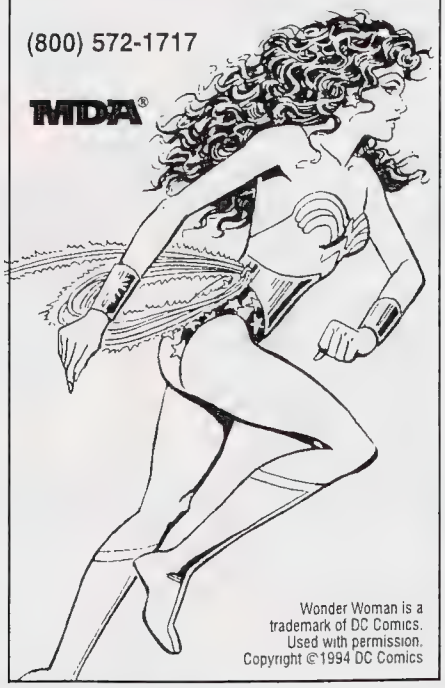

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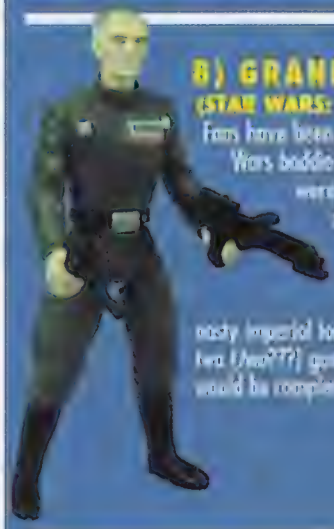
HALL OF FAME
THE TOP 10 ACTION FIGURES OF 1997

10) GRAVE DIGGER
(SPAWN SERIES 8—MCFARLANE TOYS)

This lanky creature takes the rake for one of the creepiest toys of the year. Like every other McFarlane action figure, Grave Digger's coolness hinges on his accessories. This guy lugs around two shovels, a lantern, a string of bones, a pickax and a big-ass gravestone. Throw in a few handy worm critters and you've got a top notch figure from the Spawnverse.

9) HYDRO BLAST WOLVERINE
(X-MEN: WATER WARS—TOY BIZ)

Underneath all of his water-shootin' gear is one of the best-looking Wolves in years. Toy Biz has been making a sort of ridiculous Wolverine variations recently, but this figure perfectly captures the mutant superstar's grisly essence. With his dynamic pose and fierce snarl, this puppy stands as the definitive Wolverine.



8) GRAND MOFF TARKIN
(STAR WARS: POTF 2—KENNER)

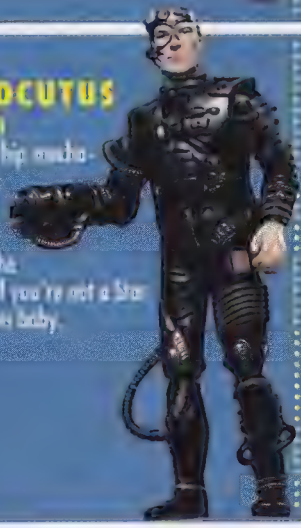
Fans have been clamoring for this classic Star Wars baddie for years, and they definitely weren't disappointed by Kenner's dead on likeness with this figure. Even though he would have been 10 times cooler if he came with one of them nasty imperial torture droids, instead of his two (two???) guns, no Star Wars collection would be complete without Tarkin.

7) PARALLAX
(BATMAN: TOTAL JUSTICE—KENNER)

Striking a good balance between detailed sculpting and dynamic posing, Parallax stands head and shoulders above the rest of the Total Justice crowd. His cape may have a little too much starch, but ol' Hal Jordan looks cool as hell standin' on your desk.

6) PICARD AS LOCUTUS
(ULTRA TREK—PLAYMATES)

Sportin' a dinky-white skin, that hip mechanized look that all the kids are goin' crazy for and a to-real-it's-creepy likeness of Patrick Stewart, this Borg (Bad Captain Picard) figure is the best Trek figure of the year. Even if you're not a Star Trek collector, you've gotta own this baby.

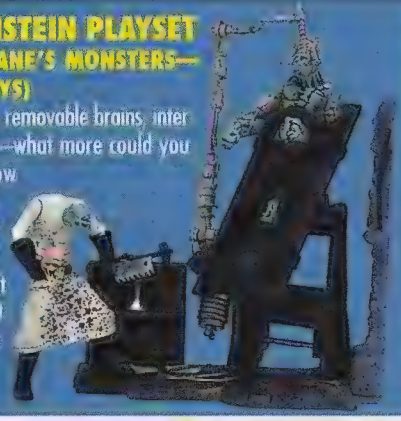


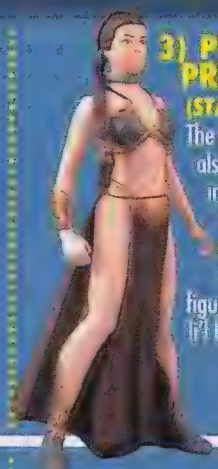
5) APOCALYPSE RISING (X-MEN: ONSLAUGHT—TOY BIZ)

While the rest of the Onslaught line wasn't all that (Wolvie towered over everybody, and what was up with Jean Grey's hair?), this rendition of Apocalypse sports a mean-lookin' sculpt and an uber-detailed paint job.

4) FRANKENSTEIN PLAYSET (TODD MCFARLANE'S MONSTERS—MCFARLANE TOYS)

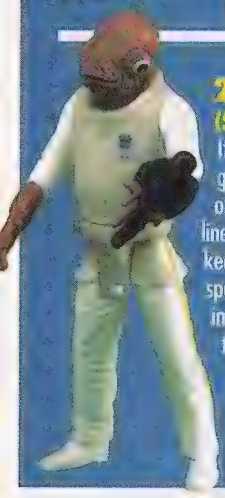
A pile of accessories, removable brains, interchangeable heads—what more could you want in a toy? How about a detailed plastic diorama base and two ghoulish-lookin' action figures? Add it all up and you've got an action-feature packed toy.





3) PRINCESS LEIA AS JABBA'S PRISONER (STAR WARS: POTF 2—KENNER)

The last Star Wars figure you'd ever expect to see also happens to be one of the best-looking figures in the line. As soon as this Leia-in-a-bikini figure hit the stores, rumors flew that she was banned by offended parents groups. Don't believe the hype—the only reason you couldn't find this figure is because every one wanted to own this hot lil' hoochie-mama.



2) ADMIRAL ACKBAR (STAR WARS: POTF 2—KENNER)

It's a trap! Sure, he's just an ugly lookin' fish guy, but good ol' Admiral Ackbar happens to be one of the highlights of Kenner's great Star Wars line. He's expertly sculpted and even sports a super-keen paint job right down to his chest insignia and spotted complexion. Hands down, this new-and-improved Ackbar beats out Kenner's version from the original Star Wars line.

1) SPIDER-MAN (SPIDER-MAN: WEB TRAPS—TOY BIZ)

With his etched-in webs and a pose right outta a Todd McFarlane comic, this figure is absolutely the last word in Spider-Man figures. Toy Biz has outdone every other Spider-Man figure ever made with this bad boy. Sure, it could have been a little more poseable, but this figure just looks so freakin' cool.

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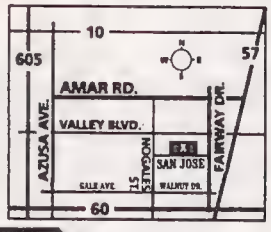

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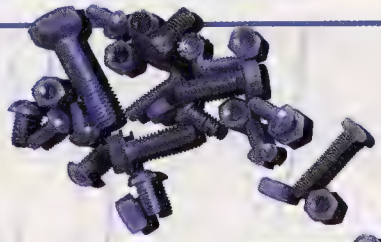
GRAND PRIZE

STAR WARS CANTINA

Sgt. Benjamin Bentley III of the 72nd Signal Battalion, Germany

Salute this military man's efforts for creating the entire "Star Wars" Cantina scene from Super Sculpey. Well, Chewie and Han are existing Power of the Force figures, but the rest are originals and darn cool.



All of these figures were made from plain old, ordinary figures and household materials. The talented Grand Prize winner dances off with an Evil Ernie sculpture and an Evil Ernie trade paperback, all signed by Brian Pulido, Steven Hughes and Jason Jensen! The Runner-Up scores an uncut Chromium trading card sheet, plus the TPB signed by Pulido, Hughes and Jensen, while everyone else gets the uncut card sheet! Super work, folks!

CHAOS! COMICS

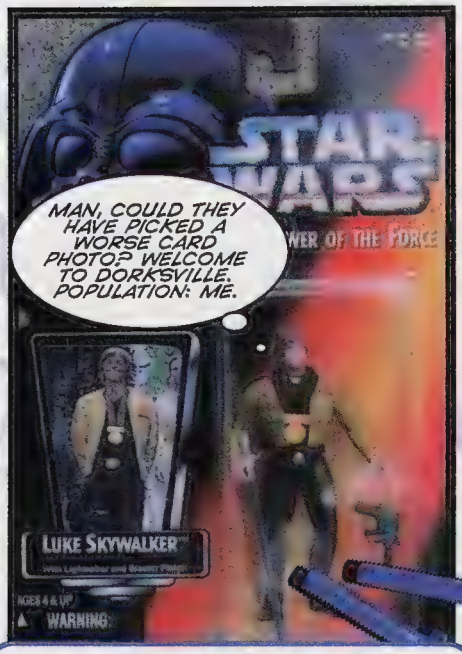
Many thanks to the Chaos! folks for the killer prizes!

RUNNER-UP

WITCHBLADE

Sunda Satow of Grants Pass, Ore.

"I'm a Barbie girl in a Witchblade world." Oh, bad joke, but great Witchblade figure, created by applying acrylic medium and paint to a simple Mattel Barbie figure.



GHOST AND THE SPIRIT

Ben Rodriguez of Joplin, Mo.

Dark Horse's Ghost was created from a Playmates Flash Gordon Dale Arden figure and some Super Sculpey, while The Spirit was constructed from a Kenner Laser Superman figure.

LUKE SKYWALKER IN CEREMONIAL OUTFIT

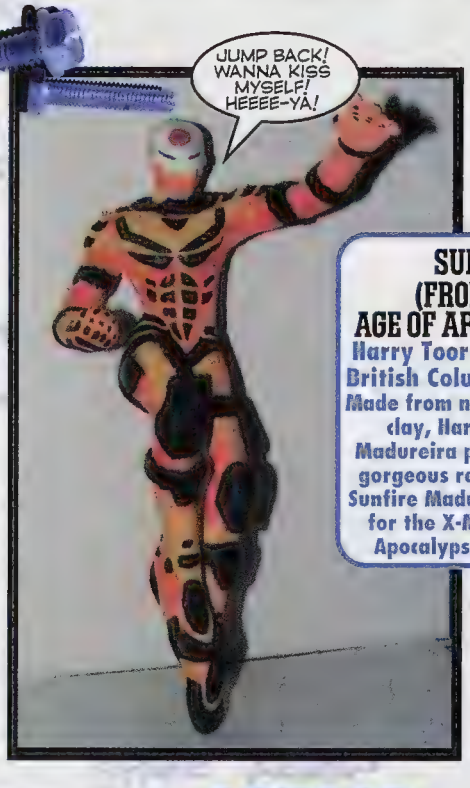
Scott Morrissey of Colonia, N.J.

Taking a 1995 Power of the Force Han Solo figure and popping a 1996 Power of the Force Dagobah Luke Skywalker head on it, Scott created a righteous-looking Luke.

THE CRITIC, JAY SHERMAN

Tom Lotz of Naples, Fla.

How would Jon Lovitz critique this puppy? He'd probably say, "It stinks." But we love this repainted Toy Biz Mole Man, which looks so very much like everyone's favorite movie critic.



SUNFIRE (FROM "THE AGE OF APOCALYPSE")

Harry Toor of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada

Made from nothing but pure clay, Harry does Joe Madureira proud with this gorgeous rendition of the Sunfire Madureira designed for the X-Men's "Age of Apocalypse" storyline.

HEY!

If you're interested in entering the homemade figure contest, send well-lit, clear, color photographs (No Polaroids, and put 'em in a cool or funny pose!), along with your name, address, a DETAILED DESCRIPTION of how you created your figure, and your full phone number (including area code) to:

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THE SKINNY

Comic book REVIEWS from *Wizard* Editors Brian Cunningham, Douglas Goldstein and Andrew Kardon

THE SCORING

6 THE BEST · 5 EXCELLENT · 4 GOOD · 3 SO-SO · 2 UGH · 1 CRAPOLA

EXCALIBUR

The Island of Misfit X-Men

Issues Reviewed: #107-#113
Genre: Superhero action/adventure
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Creative Team: Ben Raab, Salvador Larroca, Pete Woods and Scott Koblish
Price/Frequency: $1.99/Monthly

What You Need to Know: Deemed the "British X-Men," the mostly mutant team of Nightcrawler, Colossus, Shadowcat, Wolfsbane, Pete Wisdom, Meggan and Captain Britain is joined by X-scientist Moira MacTaggart to spread Prof. X's dream across the Atlantic, and defend the British Isles.

The Good: The book is good with a "British" feel when landmarks and sights are shown. When Larroca pencils the book (which was only half of the issues reviewed), the art is clean and dynamic. Seeing former X-Men characters like Colossus, Nightcrawler and Kitty Pryde together is cool for nostalgic X-fans.

The Bad: This book is crippled by having too much going on, leaving little to focus on. There is a random infusion of mutant-related plots, none of which seem to be followed up on. The random references to Moira's infection of the Legacy Virus, Ogun possessing Kitty Pryde in #111, the High Evolutionary's battle against Exodus (#113)—all of these come and go. Some storylines pass on as if they had just stopped for tea, and then merrily go on their way; many other stories end in other comics or mini-series. (You'd need to buy a *Colossus* one-shot and a *New Mutants* three-parter to finish stories that were built up in *Excalibur*.)

All of this activity is happening to a group of characters that has no spark as a team. These heroes are supporting characters, with no stand-outs coming to the forefront as stars. Nightcrawler reminds you too often that he's the team leader by stating it outright a few times an issue, but other than that, you don't believe it.

And speaking of Nightcrawler, of all the rather mundane costume changes on the book, his is by far the worst; if Nightcrawler (who should be called "Pirate Smurf" with his silly hoop earring and swords) gets his color from a thin layer of blue fur, how did he grow a goatee?

The recent additions to the team are super-weak. Pete Wisdom is a poor man's Wolverine (mysterious ties to the government, cocky attitude, use of finger blades) and Douglock is a boorish Data knock-off from "Star Trek: The Next Generation," spending too much time on his quest to understand emotions and his relationship with Wolfsbane.

In the end, there is no drama built into any of these stories. When the Dragons of the Crimson Dawn threaten Captain Britain's life, you never feel it really *is* threatened. When Colossus and Meggan survive a plane crash in the mountains, you don't believe the status quo will truly be altered (and it isn't).

The Buzz: Rumored to be considered for cancellation, this is the lowest-selling X-title (which still ain't shabby for a top 30 seller).

The Skinny: *Excalibur* is a title with static supporting characters and lacks solid storytelling. As it stands, this book is a poor excuse for keeping once-cool characters like Nightcrawler, Colossus and Kitty Pryde out of the real X-Men.

Excalibur is a collection of supporting characters with no stand-outs.

Pete Wisdom is nothing more than a crappy Wolverine rehash with his "finger blades."

The Verdict: 1 CRAPOLA

THE SKINNY

DETECTIVE COMICS

A lack of drama equals a Defective Comic

Issues Reviewed: #708-#714
Genre: Superhero action/adventure
Publisher: DC Comics
Creative Team: Chuck Dixon, Graham Nolan and assorted inkers
Price/Frequency: $1.95/Monthly

What You Need To Know: The shock of seeing his parents slain before him drove young Bruce Wayne to dedicate his life to fighting crime. Donning the costume of the Batman, he now cleans up Gotham City with his sidekick Robin and helpful ally Oracle.

The Good: More than any other modern-continuity Bat-book, this title makes good use of Batman's supporting cast. Batman interacts well with Robin, being stern yet paternal. Commissioner Gordon actually has the sense of humor to leave his roof before Batman pulls his "disappearing act," giving you the impression that they've worked together for years. Even cops Bullock and Montoya are shown to be a "Laurel and Hardy"-type cop team.

Batman's Bruce Wayne persona is particularly enjoyable. The reader falls for his shallow playboy billionaire act. He never makes a fool of himself, and even uses Wayne's bumbling persona to help people. (Example: In issue #711, Wayne recognizes a crook trying to swindle people's money in a *faux*-stock investment; with Wayne's bad rep for stock picks, he scares off the dupes by becoming interested.)

The layouts and dialogue make for sharp storytelling and it's very easy to follow what's going on.

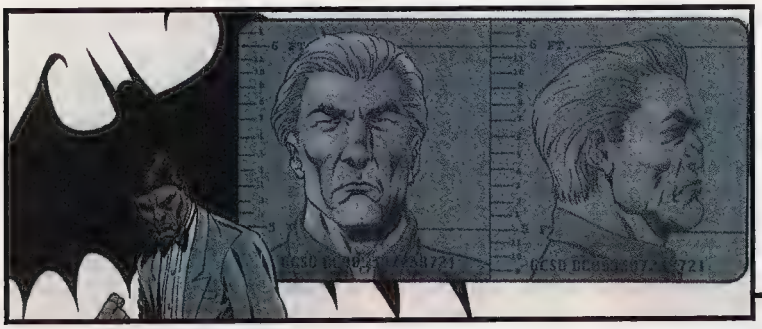
The Bad: Unfortunately, there isn't much to follow. For a book called *Detective Comics*, there isn't much detective work. Plots and storylines are dull with no twists to surprise you. While the heart of the stories aren't bad, they lack excitement and drama.

As an example, you see very early on in the assassins storyline (#708-#710) who is bringing the assassins to Gotham and why. In this case, the clear storytelling works against the enjoyment of the book. Since you know Batman himself isn't about to be killed by one of the shooters, the mystery of *why* they were at work should've been the hook to the story. The only noteworthy part—a killer's motivation to redeem himself when his lover/partner leaves him because he's lost his aim—is tossed aside as a minor plot point.

To add to the dry stories, the coloring is flat. When Firefly shows up surrounded in fire, the flames are actually dark orange-brown instead of fiery yellow-red.

The Buzz: Look for a massive Bat-book crossover where an earthquake hits Gotham early next year. It could match the hype of 1995's successful "Contagion" Bat-crossover.

The Skinny: Though the strength of the Batman character and supporting cast comes through, the stories that carry them are ultimately unmemorable.



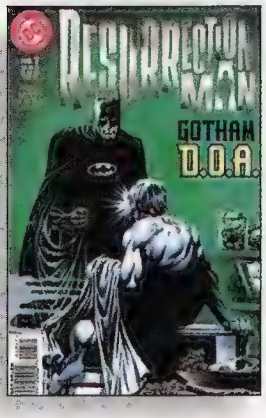
The supporting cast is handled well—particularly Commissioner Gordon's sense of humor.

Issue #711—easily the best issue of the bunch—had a great story with Bruce Wayne recognizing disguised criminals at a party.

The Verdict: 3 SO-SO

RESURRECTION MAN

No-death adventures leave you flatlined

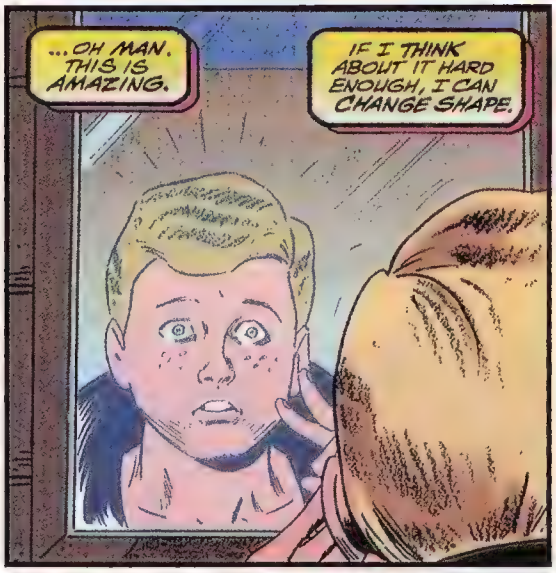


Issues Reviewed: #1-#9
Genre: Superhero action/adventure
Publisher: DC Comics
Creative Team: Andy Lanning, Dan Abnett and Butch Guice
Price/Frequency: $2.50/Monthly

What You Need to Know: Mitch Shelley was a victim of a mysterious experiment granting him the ability to repeatedly return from the dead, each time with a different superpower. He now roams America doing good deeds.

The Good: The strength of this book lies in its awesome concept. It allows for a great deal of variety, and the writers are making use of it; each superpower Mitch gets seems to be distinct from the others. One time, he could fly, project emotional force, encase his body in rocky armor and was even a flaming skeleton. It's a neat twist made more interesting by the fact that Mitch doesn't know what power he gets, and sometimes figures it out only just before dying again.

Since Mitch can come back from the dead, you get a taste of what other comics rarely give you. The hero dies. Repeatedly. It's fun to watch the story unfold around Mitch when the villains think the guy is a corpse.



There's a few genuine surprises in this book. For the first six issues, you followed Mitch, who had amnesia after being killed in an explosion, as he tried to make sense of his life. Each time he discovered a piece of his past, there was another twist waiting for him (his wife and ex-partner killed him, for example). It keeps you on your toes.

The Bad: The book flounders in issues that don't deal with Mitch Shelley searching for his origin. There is nothing to issue #7 except to have Mitch go to Gotham and die a few times in order to work in a Batman guest appearance. In issue #8, Mitch is host to a corny "Bigfoot is real" story. Otherwise, they sidetracked Mitch's origin story.

A problem the writers will have to overcome with the book is its lack of drama. Since you know the main character cannot die, and there has yet to be any supporting characters built up to care about, nothing is at risk for Mitch. There's never any doubt Mitch will get up after any failure, so there's no thrill to his adventures.

The thrill definitely doesn't come from the vampiric villain Hooker, who apparently was in the same experiment Mitch was. All this guy does is bitch about how he's jealous of Mitch's abilities; when they finally confront each other in issues #4-#5, Hooker gets the crap knocked out of him. Ho-hum.

The Buzz: This book is slowly getting attention, helped by it's high-profiled guest stars. Talk is growing, and the premise is tailor-made for a TV series, so don't be surprised...

The Skinny: *Resurrection Man*'s premise is a great one, but it's yearning for stronger stories to explore that concept with.

The writers make the most out of each superpower Mitch Shelly gains.

Resurection Man's concept is a great one, but there's a lack of drama since he can't die.

The Verdict: 4 GOOD

QUANTUM AND WOODY

The World's FUNNIEST Superhero Team

Issues Reviewed: #1-#9
Genre: Superhero comedy
Publisher: Acclaim Comics
Creative Team: Christopher Priest, MD Bright and Greg Adams
Price/Frequency: $2.50/Monthly

What You Need to Know: Childhood friends Eric Henderson and Woody Van Chelten get caught in a bizarre lab accident fusing a "control band" to each others' wrist. The bands must make contact once every 24 hours or the duo will dissipate into formless energy. Donning costumes, the two now fight crime as Quantum and Woody.

The Good: This book is hysterical, plain and simple. From the title and tagline themselves ("The world's *worst* superhero team!") to the characters and scenarios, *Quantum and Woody* never takes itself too seriously.

And that's mostly thanks to the great interaction between the two characters. Eric, a rich kid from Connecticut, has always been the "mature" responsible one, while Woody's more of the happy-go-lucky class clown. Eric believes everything's one giant conspiracy; for example, he dragged Woody to Malaysia and Egypt in issue #3 to track a certain dye that turned out to be red Kool-Aid—just as Woody predicted. Woody, however, is the lovable buffoon who somehow screws things up, even when he's right. For example, while saving some hostages in issue #8, Woody grabs one of them, claiming that the bad guys always plant their own amongst the hostages; turns out he's right, except the real terrorist was the old lady behind him.

The frequent chapters break up each issue nicely and are good for setting up the quick joke. Flashbacks show Eric and Woody doing goofy stuff as kids (like tranquilizing the neighbor's dog), which relate back to the main story (Eric *still* blames Woody for the punishment he received afterwards.). These flashbacks help establish the strong bond that exists between these two friends.

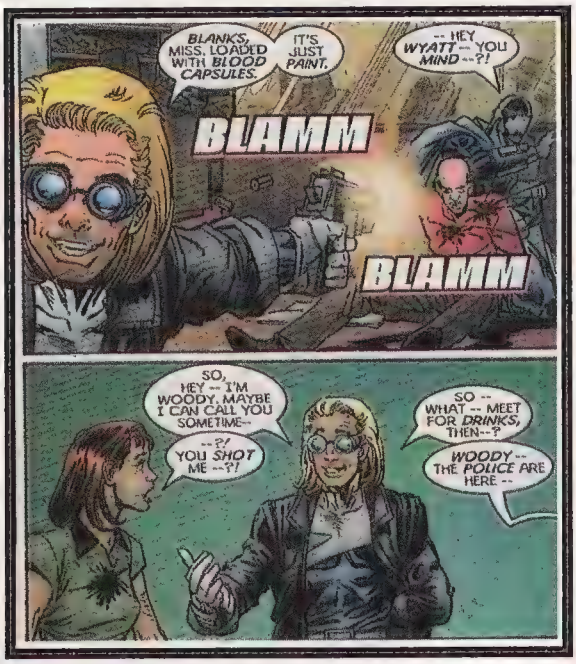
The Bad: While *Quantum and Woody* is intentionally funny, there's really no depth to the stories beyond the humor level. A better balance between humor and drama would add more substance to this title.

Quantum and Woody works best when it keeps to its own sense of humor. Issue #9's guest appearance by the teenage superteam, Troublemakers, just didn't work because it didn't fit into the book's comedic style. The book should stick to topical humor as there are also a lot of annoying in-jokes connected to other Acclaim books that most casual readers just won't get—and aren't funny in the first place.

And while the flashbacks are usually pretty funny, occasionally, they get a bit confusing to follow. In issue #9, it was hard to tell whether that li'l blonde haired kid was Woody or one of the Troublemakers.

The Buzz: Not many folks are grabbin' onto this truly witty book. Positive word of mouth is probably this title's only salvation.

The Skinny: What started out as the stupidest sounding comic we ever heard of truly shocked the hell out of us. *Quantum and Woody* is one of the funniest comics on the market today. If you don't take your superheroes too seriously, you'll love this series.



In one issue, the dreaded "n-word" was replaced with the word "noogie," and the "s-word" replaced with, well, "s-word." The result is hilarious.

Quantum and Woody *is the "Lethal Weapon" of comics.*

The Verdict: 5 EXCELLENT

Acclaim Comics Presents...

The Quantum and Woody's "Get The Goat" Contest

He's Vincent Van Goat—that lovable li'l fellow from *Quantum & Woody*. But November is Acclaim Comics' "Goat Month" and he's gonna be hip-hopping his way through *all* of the Valiant Heroes titles!

How to Win:

Those wacky Acclaim artists have hidden Mr. Van Goat on at least one page in *each* of the Acclaim Comics listed below. Your job is to find that goat and note every one of goat sightings on the entry form. Be specific! We need you to list each issue, which page(s), and the number of panels Vincent appears in. If you have a sharp enough eye you could win...

GOATEE GOODIES

Grand Prize (1): One lucky goat lover will receive one page of M.D. Bright original artwork from *Quantum & Woody* #3 (the Goat Issue!). You'll also win a signed set of *Quantum & Woody* #1-#8 and a *Quantum & Woody* Valiant Voyeur. That oughta get your goat!

First Prize (10): Ten other Goat Herders will receive a signed set of *Quantum & Woody* #1-#8 and a *Quantum & Woody* Valiant Voyeur! Love them there goats!!

Second Prize (20): Twenty other were-goats will receive a *Quantum & Woody* Valiant Voyeur! Love them goats! Mmmm... Goats!

Fill this out, attach your entry and put it in an envelope. Send it to: Quantum and Woody's "Get The Goat" Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

DEADLINE IS JANUARY 30, 1998.

This month's contest is sponsored by Acclaim Comics and according to Acclaim none of us exist.

Legally it's Goat Cheese

No purchase necessary. Contest is open to anyone except employees of Wizard Press, Acclaim Comics, their immediate families and Solar. How many times have we told you not to play with black holes near the house!! Print your name, date of birth, address, city, state, zip and telephone number with area code on the official entry form or a 3-by-5-inch index card, and attach the form or card to your entry. Enter as many times as you like. Mail each entry separately to: Quantum & Woody's "Get The Goat", c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118. No mechanical reproductions of completed forms are accepted, but you can photocopy the entry form before filling it out if you don't want to mess up your magazine. All entries become property of Wizard Press and none will be returned. All taxes (federal, state and local, if any) will be the responsibility of the prize winners. No cash equivalent or substitute prizes will be offered. Prizes are awarded in the names of the contest winners and are not transferable. Offer void where prohibited, regulated or restricted by law in a manner inconsistent with the purposes and rules hereof. **All entries must be received at contest headquarters by January 30, 1998.** Wizard Press is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Odds of winning will be determined by the number of valid entries received prior to the closing date of the contest. Prize winners will be randomly selected from among all properly completed entries by Wizard Press. Winning entries will be selected on or about February 13, 1998.

For a list of winners, available after February 13, 1998, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Quantum & Woody's "Get The Goat" Winners List, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

Quantum and Woody's "Get the Goat" Form

DEADLINE IS JANUARY 30, 1998!

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number (with area code) _____

The Goat's Where abouts:

OCTOBER RELEASE:

Solar #2 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

NOVEMBER RELEASES:

Quantum and Woody #10 ... Page ___ Panels _____

Bloodshot #9 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

Eternal Warriors: Blackworks . Page ___ Panels _____

Magnus: Robot Fighter #11 .. Page ___ Panels _____

Shadowman #13 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

Troublemakers #12 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

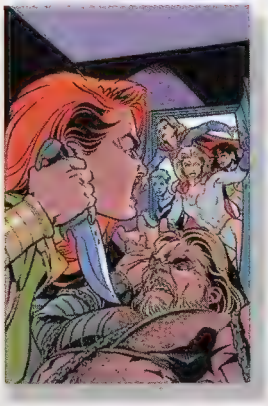
Trinity Angels #9 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

X-O Manowar #14 ..... Page ___ Panels _____

PICKS

THE MUST-READ COMICS SHIPPING IN DECEMBER

AKIKO #21


AQUAMAN #41

TITLES DENOTED WITH AN **MR** CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.

ADVENTURES IN THE DC UNIVERSE #11

DC COMICS Poor Green Lantern. He's trapped in a dimension where superheroes (and superpowers) can't exist. Even worse, he's lost his memory *and* his power ring. His only hope? Wonder Woman. Thing is, the Amazon Princess has gotta give up her powers to enter the realm. By Steve Vance, John Delaney and Ron Boyd. **$1.95**

AKIKO #21

SIRIUS Akiko's roguish pal Spuckler takes to the spaceways, planet-hopping and doing that "robbing from the rich" Robin Hood-type stuff. When our buddy gets caught stealing on the planet Brunk, though, he's thrown in the slammer and made to suffer a sentence of solitary confinement. In his cell, however, Spuckler soon discovers he's most definitely not alone. By Mark Crilley. **$2.50**

AQUAMAN #41

DC COMICS Aquaman, the hook-handed King of Poseidonis, experiences every man's fantasy when he's kidnapped by the überwoman (and ex-JLA member) Maxima. Maxi wants to marry ol' fish-face and just might get her wish—unless, of course, the female armada of Deep Blue, Dolphin, Power Girl and Tsunami can bust up the nuptials. This kind of stuff only happens in comics. (And maybe *Penthouse*.) By Peter David, Jim Calafiore and P.L. Palmiotti. **$1.95**

THE BATGIRL ADVENTURES #1

DC COMICS This funky one-shot gives the babelicious Batgirl the spotlight in the always-funky "Adventures" style. Trouble starts when the villainous Poison Ivy is kidnapped by mob thugs. As time is running out for Ivy, her partner-in-crime Harley Quinn does the unexpected: She turns to her mortal foe Batgirl for help. By Paul Dini and Rick Burchett. Dini says, "This book is designed to be nothing more than a simple little Christmas romp with Batgirl and Harley Quinn. It's always fun writing a Harley story, 'cause she's such a screwball, and it's fun putting her in contrast with Batman or Batgirl, because they're the exact opposite of what she is." **$2.95**

BIRDS OF PREY: BATGIRL #1

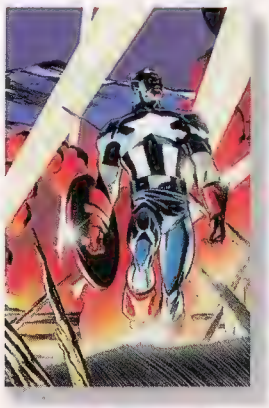
DC COMICS When titans team up, evildoers quake in their evil pants. Unfortunately, when the once-paralyzed Batgirl and Black Canary team up, there's nary a quake to be had. Batgirl seems to be a whole lot healthier, which is a good thing, 'cause the two have to scrap with the Mad Hatter and a slew of super-crazies loose in Arkham Asylum. But how's Batgirl walking? We ain't telling. By Chuck Dixon, Greg Land and Drew Geraci. **$2.95**

CAPTAIN AMERICA #2

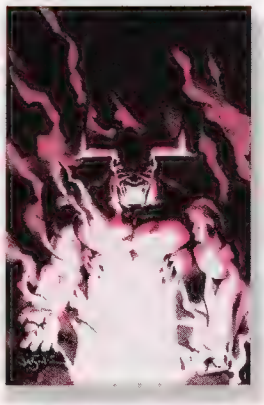
MARVEL Like the wise man said, "Dry your eyes, my little friend...there's jubilation in the land." The original ("A"-wearing!) Captain America is back in the Marvel Universe and we can't stop grinning like loons. This ish sees our hero stuck on a Navy sub that's floating like a wounded duck. And while his ship's sinking, Cap suffers a tremendous loss. (No, it's not his bowels...) By Mark

THE BATGIRL ADVENTURES #1

BIRDS OF PREY: BATGIRL #1



CAPTAIN AMERICA #2



NEW YEAR'S EVIL: GOG #1

Waid, Ron Garney and Bob Wiacek. **$1.99**

CASTLE WAITING #4

OLIO Slap on some gloves, grab some clean towels and boil some water, because Lady Jain is giving birth in Castle Waiting. The blessed event is the talk of the castle; unfortunately, all the strange inhabitants of Waiting are wondering who (or what) is the baby's father. By Linda Medley, who says, "*Castle Waiting* is not a superhero book, and it's not a real high-action or adventure comic. But because it's different, it gives people something else to get into, and it has a long, involved storyline with a whole lot of different characters that people find really enjoyable." **$2.95**

CONCRETE: STRANGE ARMOR #1 (OF 5)

DARK HORSE Listen, my friends, to the sad story of speechwriter Ron Lithgow, as told by the scribe Paul Chadwick. Listen and heed these words so that your brain may never become trapped in a cement body. "Ron Lithgow says goodbye to his boss, then his ex-wife, and sets off on a camping trip. It's not the vacation he plans. He's abducted [by aliens], his brain is transplanted, and he's nearly driven mad. He mounts a bloody escape, but his troubles, and captivities, have just begun. Before it's over, he must escape being a government guinea pig, a freakish celebrity and the thrall of a tough father-figure, to find a new freedom as Concrete." By Paul Chadwick, who also says, "Why redo Concrete's origin? I'm older, I draw better, I understand storytelling more. A good tale bears retelling…and a few changes too! I may do this again in 2007." **$2.95**

DESPERADOES #4

HOMAGE/IMAGE Blood, guns and spilled guts are the order of the day in the Western town of Antelope Springs when the three Desperadoes finally catch up to the supernatural child-killer Leander Peik. Meaning to put Peik down like the dog he is, the Desperadoes go in, guns a-blazing. And before the shooting stops, private investigator Race Kennedy (who's been hunting Peik *and* the Desperadoes) will reveal his true allegiance. By Jeff Mariotte and John Cassaday. Mariotte says, "There's a gigantic gunfight involving most of the residents of the town of Antelope Springs. There's a truly horrific penultimate scene—maybe the scariest moment in the book to date." **$2.50**

FANTASTIC FOUR #2

MARVEL Somebody's *not* moving back into Four Freedoms Plaza, and it's probably the Fantastic Four. As the team moves into its new New York City headquarters, the bad, bad man called Iconoclast shows up to obliterate the one woman who's capable of seeing him: the Invisible Woman. By Scott Lobdell, Alan Davis and Mark Farmer. **$1.99**

THE FLASH #134

DC COMICS His name is Jay Garrick, but you can call him Flash. Before Barry Allen and Wally West were soiling diapers, Garrick was racing around with a metal colander on his head, fighting crime as the original Scarlet Speedster. In this issue, Garrick (who should rightly be collecting Social Security and taking Metamucil) battles Flash's foes Weather Wizard and Captain Cold. By Grant Morrison, Mark Millar, Paul Ryan and John Nyberg. **$1.95**

GREEN LANTERN #95

DC COMICS Green Lantern travels to the deepest regions of space, tracking a distress call to a floating city. Once there, he finds that robots are doing all the work, while the city's bloated rulers are disappearing like cookies at an Al Roker look-alike contest. Tracking down the culprits, Lantern discovers the kidnappers just might be the good guys in this sordid mess. By Ron Marz and Jim Starlin. Marz says, "It's a story Jim [Starlin] wanted to draw. He wanted robots, so we made sure we got him robots to draw. Jim's the one who got me into comics in the first place, so working with him as an artist was kind of like coming full circle for me." **$1.95**

READ THIS BOOK!

AVENGERS #1

MARVEL We have never been so proud of sounding like complete jackasses—AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!!! Earth's Mightiest Heroes return to the one true Marvel Universe, where they find themselves under attack from various baddies straight outta Asgard. As the original Avengers join together to combat this danger, a mystery villain (as if we'd *really* give away the secret) plots to steal the Asgardian Twilight Sword to redecorate the universe. By Kurt Busiek, George Pérez and Al Vey. Busiek says, "Loki would seem to be the first likely suspect when you're dealing with Avengers forming and Asgardian menaces all over the place. That's all I'm going to say. But the founding Avengers that are available get back together and send out the call for the Avengers to assemble. And they get an *awful* lot of Avengers—possibly more Avengers than have ever been in the book before. So they start up the team again, head off to investigate the problem and find themselves—even with this many Avengers and this much firepower—in way over their heads." **$2.99**

HITMAN #23

DC COMICS "Who Dares Wins," Part 1 (of 5). The superhero assassin Hitman and his war buddy Natt originally met in Desert Storm, where they aced a bunch of British soldiers in a "friendly fire" accident. This was a bad move, 'cause the dead soldiers were members of the Special Air Service (SAS)—a group that *always* avenges its members' deaths. Guess who's now in the crosshairs. By Garth Ennis, John McCrea and Gary Leach. **$2.25**

JLA #15

DC COMICS "Rock of Ages," Part 6 (of 6). It's a dark day for the JLA as the world's greatest heroes defeat the world-conquering Darkseid, liberate the Earth from his evil rule and prevent the destruction of humanity. Doesn't sound too bad? Well, when you consider that Lex Luthor *wanted* all of this to happen, it sure does! The JLA might actually wish for Darkseid's return when they see that Luthor's got the all-powerful Philosopher's Stone. By Grant Morrison, Howard Porter, Gary Frank and John Dell. Also check out *JLA: Paradise Lost* #2 (of 3), where the Martian Manhunter fights for his life, while Zauriel and his love Shannon flee from Heaven *and* Hell. By Mark Millar and Ariel Olivetti. ***JLA* #15—$2.95; *PARADISE LOST* #2—$1.95**

JLA: YEAR ONE #2 (OF 12)

DC COMICS Earth's Mightiest Heroes, they weren't. The Justice League of America, green as a college freshman after five beers, battles the undying Vandal Savage and a team of supervillains he's controlling. And while the battle rages, a certain Dark Knight finds he's connected to this new superhero team more than he'd like. By Mark Waid, Brian Augustyn and Barry Kitson. **$1.95**

NEW YEAR'S EVIL: PROMETHEUS #1

PREACHER #34

READ THIS BOOK!

IRON MAN #1

MARVEL Few things in this world would make us drop our drawers and do a dance of jubilation—and *Iron Man* #1 is certainly not one of them. Still, it's really great to see the armored Avenger back in the heart of the Marvel Universe. Here, Iron Man tussles with high-tech mercenaries called the Death Squad, rediscovers his friends and is forced to decide whether or not to buy out his Japanese partners at Stark/Fujikawa Industries. By Kurt Busiek, Sean Chen and Eric J. Cannon. Busiek says, "The story centers around the fact that Tony is back. Tony is an adult again, he's Iron Man again, he's rich again, he's cool again and the main question that has to be settled is, 'Is he going to try to get Stark Enterprises back from Fujikawa?' The company was sold to them after he died, but he's not dead. So does that make the sale legal? At the same time, we're dealing with Tony Stark back in the Marvel Universe, having a fancy party at his new penthouse digs, fighting supervillains and using the new armor. So there's plenty of high-tech action and high-society style." **$2.99**

KA-ZAR #10

MARVEL "Urban Jungle," Part 3 (of 4). In the jungle (the urban jungle, that is), Ka-Zar and the forces of S.H.I.E.L.D. tackle the cosmic scumbag Thanos. While the boys fight it out with New York City at stake, Ka-Zar's wife Shanna examines the mysterious Savage Land Crystal. By Mark Waid, Andy Kubert and Jesse Delperdang. **$1.99**

MAJOR BUMMER #7

DC COMICS Using a motley collection of junk (a metal detector, a car from Eastern Europe and a disposable lighter), Milton Tweeleg—tinkerer and average Joe—turned Lou Martin into a hero. Now, Tweeleg's got an ax, and Martin's life is about to be changed again. By the majorly funny team of John Arcudi, Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen. **$2.50**

NEW YEAR'S EVIL: GOG #1

DC COMICS Twenty years after *Kingdom Come*, humans and superhumans are working together to make the world a better place. But there's evil afoot as Gog, the mentor to *Kingdom Come*'s Magog, appears to take his place in the villain's hall of fame. By Mark Waid, Jerry Ordway and Dennis Janke. Waid says, "It's an overture to *Kingdom*, the [currently unscheduled] monthly series. It bridges the gap between *Kingdom Come* and *Kingdom*, in that it's a story set 20 years after *Kingdom Come*. We get a look at the world that *KC* left us with, and how it's progressed now that humans and superhumans are working hand-in-hand to improve the world. Into a world without villains emerges a man who may end up being the greatest supervillain of all time. And it's his machinations that will lead to the events of the monthly *Kingdom* series." **$1.95**

NEW YEAR'S EVIL: PROMETHEUS #1

DC COMICS Meet Prometheus. He's about to become the JLA's toughest villain—and why not? He's stolen the team members' abilities, is a master of magic and has a whole bunch of high-tech gizmos at his beck and call. Prometheus also has—as does every supervillain worth a lick—a secret plan which he reveals in this very issue. By Grant Morrison, Arnie Jorgensen and David Meikis. **$1.95**

©DC Comics

Loyal To The Corps

Restore the Majesty.
Return to the Mythology.
Support the rebirth of Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corps, in coexistence with Kyle Rayner, by joining the more than 500 people who have signed the GLC petition:

http://www.glcorps.org

or contact:
Jack Grimes
470 Schooleys Mountain Road
Hackettstown, NJ. 07840

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NIGHTWING #17

DC COMICS The quaintest little hellhole in the universe (Blüdhaven) plays host to the malevolent Man-Bat, who's out to trash the town and take down Nightwing in the process. When Nightwing's done fighting Man-Bat, he's gonna discover an old enemy has moved into his apartment building. There goes the neighborhood! By Chuck Dixon, Scott McDaniel and Karl Story. **$1.95**

POISON ELVES #30

SIRIUS Somebody's up to no good, and it's probably the assassin elf Lusipher. Police chief Vido's deputies are all turning up dead and Lusipher's the prime suspect. To catch him, the drug-addicted Vido sets a clever trap, a trap that Lusipher's not likely to avoid. By Drew Hayes. **$2.50**

PREACHER #34

VERTIGO/DC COMICS Monument Valley is set up for the brawl to end it all: Jesse Custer (a.k.a. Preacher) vs. God (a.k.a. Yahweh, Hashem, Jehovah, The Big Man). Before the battle occurs, though, Starr and the Saint of Killers step in for some unleavened chaos. Also, Custer's vampire friend Cassidy tries to show a depressed vampire the positive side of being an undead killer in *Preacher Special: Cassidy—Blood and Whiskey*. Both titles are by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon. **MR *PREACHER* #34—$2.50; *BLOOD AND WHISKEY*—$5.95**

QUANTUM AND WOODY #11

ACCLAIM In the world's most clichéd plotline, Woody's stuck in Quantum's body and Quantum's stuck in Woody's body and Mr. Furley *still* thinks Jack is gay and...whoops...wrong story. Anyway, it's Christmastime, and while Woody's looking to get retribution for an unjustly killed friend, Quantum's trying to get out of this hackneyed storyline by restoring himself and his pal to their correct bodies. By Christopher Priest, MD Bright and Greg Adams. **$2.50**

ROBIN #50

DC COMICS Passport in hand, the Boy Wonder heads to Europe to get away from things and complete his martial-arts training. There, he encounters a beautiful woman in distress, King Snake, Snake's hired killer (the dangerous Lady Shiva) and, worst of all (*shudder*), the French. By Chuck Dixon, Staz Johnson and Stan Woch. And for something completely different, check out Dixon's lead story in *The Flintstones and The Jetsons* #7, where Judy Jetson starts dating Cogswell Cogs' son and becomes an industrial spy. By Chuck Dixon, Michael Kraiger, Bill Alger, Glen Hanson and Mike DeCarlo. ***ROBIN* #50—$2.95; *THE FLINTSTONES AND THE JETSONS* #7—$1.95**

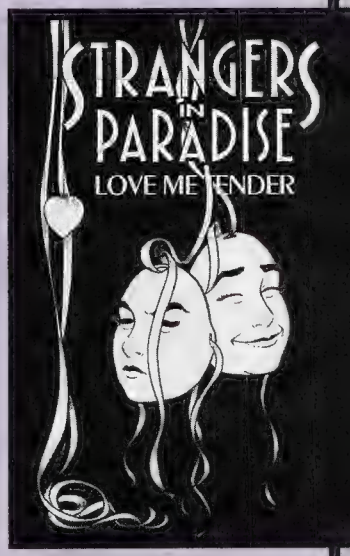
SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE #59

STRANGERS IN PARADISE #11

PAPERBACK PICKS

Trade Paperbacks You Won't Wanna Miss

Scud: Solid Gold Bomb (Fireman Press)
The Disposable Assassin is back in a trade paperback that takes him on a lunar adventure, into battle with a genuine Shakespeare-quotin' werewolf, to center stage in a toughman contest and on a quest to recover his robotic arm. And if Scud gets through all that, his foes Voodoo Ben and Jeff are waiting. This wacky and wooly paperback reprints *Scud* #10-#15. By Mondy Carter, Dan Harmon and Rob Schrab. **$17.95**



Strangers in Paradise: Love Me Tender (Abstract Studio) ▶
Katchoo and her pals David and Francine struggle to make their various relationships work. But while they're doing that (And Francine's working as a condom spokesmodel!), sinister forces conspire to bring them down. This trade paperback reprints the first five issues of the Homage/Image series in black and white for the first time, and also presents a five-page color dream sequence by Jim Lee. By Terry Moore. **$12.95**

SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE #59

VERTIGO/DC COMICS "The Cannon," Part 3 (of 4). The Golden Age Sandman strikes up a tenuous partnership with Reverend Hawsley to investigate a freighter toting some incredible (read: gold) cargo. The Sandman may just have gotten into bed with a viper, though, because it seems the reverend just made a deal with a shady gold-fencing operation. By Steven T. Seagle, Matt Wagner, Michael Lark and Richard Case. **MR $2.50**

SAVAGE DRAGON #44

HIGHBROW/IMAGE Cancel your subscription to *Bawdy Beauties and Shapely Sirens*—the Earth's just been blown up by an alien madman. With nowhere else to go, the Savage Dragon boards a cramped spaceship and goes on a star trek to find a new place to live. It's a good thing he brought two gorgeous blond women with him. By Erik Larsen. **$2.50**

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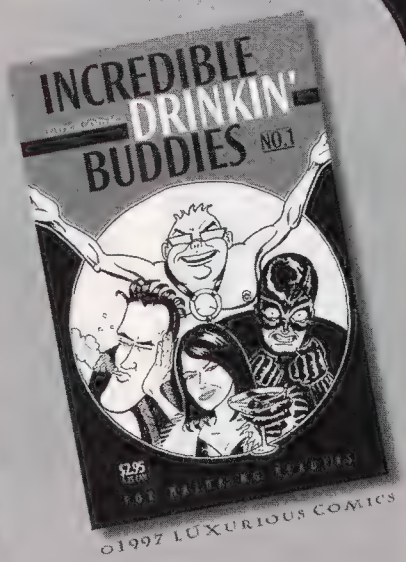

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PICKS

THUNDERBOLTS #11

UNCLE SAM #2

STARDUST #3 (OF 4)

VERTIGO/DC COMICS The half-breed Tristran Thorn has been searching for a fallen star (Erik Estrada?) to give to his true love, but he's in for a major surprise when he finds it. Seems the star's actually an angry young woman with a broken leg and a mysterious object. Heading home to the city of Wall, Tristran's gonna have to confront the other contestants looking for the "star," and they're far from kindly. By Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess. **MR $5.95**

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ABSTRACT STUDIO To escape her past, Katchoo is going to have to pull off one last job for her boss Darcy Parker. Taking the name and identity of Julie Wallis, Katchoo goes undercover for some political shenanigans. Plus, while Detective Walsh and Francine's search for Katchoo brings them closer, Katchoo's friend David Parker goes into the family business to ruin his sister. By Terry Moore. **$2.75**

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VERTIGO/DC COMICS Terminal City turns the wack-ometer to 11, as window washer Cosmo Quinn battles a crazed skywriter who likes to write curses in the clouds. Then there's the huckster Monty Vickers, who plots to bring the Loch Ness Monster to Terminal City, and Quinn's window-washing pal B.B. gets kidnapped by a robot. And that's just the *mildly* weird stuff. By Dean Motter and Michael Lark. **MR $2.50**

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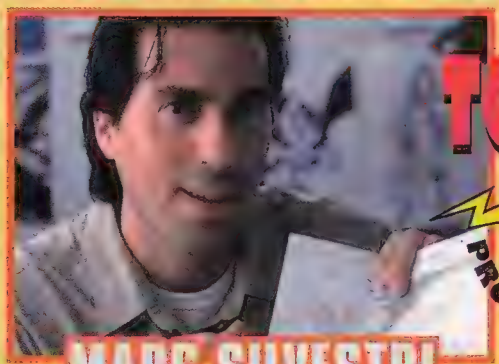

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IRON MAN

Iron Man is back from the "Heroes Reborn" Universe and is getting a new look. Now Marvel Comics is giving you a chance to throw Shell-head some fashion tips.

Sean Chen, the House of Ideas' new *Iron Man* artist, is interested in your ideas for Iron Man's new look. He wants you to redesign the hero's regular armor or develop a new kind of special-use armor (Y'know, like deep-sea armor, heavy-artillery armor, Vegas showgirl, etc.). The best combination of creative concept and cool art will win the...

Grand Prize (1): One lucky artist will win a sketch of his redesigned armor drawn by Marvel Comics' Sean Chen! And for outfitting the Golden Avenger, Enyce's gonna outfit the winner from head to toe with three complete outfits, including jeans, shirts, jackets and hats! You can't beat that with a repulsor ray!

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Fill this out, attach your entry and put it in an envelope. Send it to: "Armor Makes The Man" Iron Man Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

Deadline is January 30, 1998!

Iron-Clad Legalese

No purchase necessary. This contest is open to anyone except employees of Wizard Press, Marvel Comics, Enyce, their immediate families and that teenaged Tony Stark...*thing* we all wish we could forget. Print your name, date of birth, address, city, state, zip and telephone number with area code on the official entry form or a 3-by-5-inch index card, and attach the form or card to your entry. Enter as many times as you like. Mail each entry separately to: "Armor Makes The Man" Iron Man Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118. No mechanical reproductions of completed forms are accepted, but you can photocopy the entry form before filling it out if you don't want to mess up your magazine. All entries become property of Marvel Comics and none will be returned. All taxes (federal, state and local, if any) will be the responsibility of the prize winners. No cash equivalent or substitute prizes will be offered. Prizes are awarded in the names of the contest winners and are not transferable. Offer void where prohibited, regulated or restricted by law in a manner inconsistent with the purposes and rules ....hereof. Iron Man likes cheese. **All entries must be received at contest headquarters by January 30, 1998.** Wizard Press is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Odds of winning will be determined by the number of valid entries received prior to the closing date of the contest. Prize winners will be selected based on originality and creativity by Wizard Press. Winning entries will be selected on or about February 13, 1998.

For a list of winners, available after February 13, 1998, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: "Armor Makes The Man" Iron Man Winners List, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

The "Armor Makes the Man" Entry Form

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Did you attach your entry?

TRAILER PARK

***Wizard*'s column about Hollywood and TV and stuff like that**

GOOD NEWS FOR DC'S TOP HEROES

By Rob Allstetter

Warner Bros. has its superheroes in a row. The movie studio's plans for the next **Superman** and **Batman** films, murky in the past few months, are starting to become clear. It appears "Superman Lives" will reach theaters in the summer of 1999, with the fifth Batman movie to follow the next summer.

According to sources, Warner Bros. has pushed back the production start of "Superman Lives" until June. Director Tim Burton has dumped the script of Kevin Smith ("Mallrats," "Chasing Amy"), which was based on "The Death of Superman" comics story. A new script is still in the works. Reportedly, part of "Superman Lives" will be shot in Pittsburgh.

Nicolas Cage is set to star in the movie, but no other casting has taken place yet. Before production of "Superman Lives" begins, Cage might star in "8 Millimeter," which is tentatively scheduled to be directed by Joel Schumacher, director of the last two Batman films.

Everett Collection

Cage's "Superman" has been bumped to 1999.

After the disappointing box-office intake of "Batman & Robin," there was speculation that the Bat-franchise might be at its end. Not so. The next installment, according to Warner executive Bob Daly in *Premiere* magazine, is tentatively scheduled for 2000.

"The next Batman we do, in three years—and we have a deal with George Clooney to do it—will have just one villain," Daly told *Premiere*.

Word is that Warner Bros. wants to return to the tone of the first Bat-flick. Originally, it was thought Scarecrow and Harley Quinn would be the villains.

SPAWN SEQUEL A GO

Terry Fitzgerald of Todd McFarlane Productions confirmed that there will be a sequel to last summer's **"Spawn"** live-action film from New Line Cinema. "I just received the official optioning letter," Fitzgerald said.

It's likely **Michael Jai White** will return as Spawn. Early indications are the sequel might be spookier than the first film, in line with the current flavor of the comic and the animated series.

"Spawn," which did $53.9 million at the box office at press time, will be released on home video on Dec. 23 in two versions: the original PG-13 theatrical version and a new, R-rated director's cut.

"Spawn" was one of 13 movies Turner Broadcasting recently acquired the exclusive U.S. broadcast network window rights to. Set to air on cable network TBS are "Spawn," "Steel," which stars Shaquille O'Neal as the DC Comics' armored hero, and "Blade," the upcoming film based on Marvel Comics' vampire hunter.

Everett Collection

White (above) is likely to do "Spawn 2."

Meanwhile, Fitzgerald said the "Spawn" animated series will return with new episodes on HBO, probably in February.

"I just watched a pencil test for episode eight. [It] looks killer," Fitzgerald said. "All animation for the next six is being done in Japan. Expect a more 'Ghost in the Shell' kind of feel."

The voice cast from the first season, including **Keith David** as Spawn, is returning for the second season.

Sales of the first six episodes of the "Spawn" series on home video have been outstanding, according to Fitzgerald. More than 1.2 million copies have been ordered, and "Spawn" was No. 2 on the charts for five consecutive weeks.

It appears Todd McFarlane's base in Hollywood might continue to grow, too. Sources state that Todd McFarlane Productions is in negotiations with three major studios about setting up a production company on their lots.

See the fate of Mr. Freeze's wife in "SubZero."

'SUBZERO' IN SPRINGTIME

"Batman: SubZero," the animated movie originally intended to come out on home video this past summer, now has a release date of March 17, according to Boyd Kirkland, who produced and wrote the film with Randy Rogel.

"Once it did not come out during the summer, [Warner Bros.] looked at the fall schedule and felt there were so many other big video releases coming out, that it would get lost and it would be best to wait," Kirkland said. "They tell me Easter is the second-biggest season for purchase of family videos behind Christmas."

"SubZero," which spotlights Mr. Freeze and Batgirl, is set in the style of the original "Batman" animated series on Fox. It features extensive use of computer-generated animation. The story will resolve Mr. Freeze's attempts to cure his wife; elements of the plot were touched upon in the recent "Cold Comfort" "Batman" episode.

Kirkland dispelled rumors the film was being tweaked to meet the look of the new Batman episodes on Kids' WB! or that the movie simply wasn't ready for release.

"The movie is done, and I'm very proud of it," Kirkland said. "The reason it's sitting on the shelf is for marketing reasons. It's been frustrating to have it just sit there."

According to Kirkland, thoughts of having "SubZero" reach theaters in a limited release have been scrapped.

Kirkland said he has a couple new projects in development. "I'd prefer to make projects in the direct-to-video or the movie/video area," he said. "You can get more money to do a better job than in the series format."

Meanwhile, Batman is giving the Kids' WB! network a ratings jolt. "World's Finest," the Oct. 4 three-part episode of **"The New Batman/Superman Adventures,"** set a ratings record for the network and was also shown in primetime on Oct. 17. Kids' WB! is up some 40 percent in general ratings from last season.

SILVER TONGUES ON SURFER SHOW

As voice director of the "Spider-Man," "Iron Man" and "Fantastic Four" animated series, **Tony Pastor** is used to working with Marvel characters in a Los Angeles setting, tapping many of the area's voice talents.

But, as voice and casting director of the **"Silver Surfer"** series, now tentatively set to premiere on Fox in February, he is working with the growing voice-talent pool in Toronto.

"There's such a background in theater, with the talent from Stratford," Pastor said. "It's a very character-driven show, and the verbiage is excellent."

Look for the Silver Surfer and Galactus to have a Kirby-esque design in the new Fox series.

Paul Essiembre is doing the voice of Silver Surfer and Norrin Radd.

"Everything said actually means something, and he's a very esoteric character," Pastor said. "He explains why he feels the way he feels. It just isn't a shoot-'em-up action/drama. He has the complexes of the thinking guy."

Pastor said the "Silver Surfer" provides "the best writing I've ever recorded in animation." The first three episodes will deal with the Surfer's origin on Zenn-La with Galactus, and many of Marvel's cosmic characters will appear in the first season.

Several of the **"X-Men"** series regulars will be contributing to "Silver Surfer," including Alyson Court (Jubilee) as Amber, Norm Spencer (Cyclops) as Drax and Cedric Smith (Professor Xavier) as Mentor.

Other cast members include Camilla Scott as Shalla-Bal, Colin Fox as The Watcher, James Blendick as Galactus, Gary Krawford as Thanos, Robert Bockstael as Pip, Tara Rosling as Nova and Jennifer Dale as Nebula.

Thirteen episodes have been recorded for the first season. "Silver Surfer" will likely take the place of "X-Men" in Fox's Saturday morning line-up.

© 1997 Saban Entertainment. Silver Surfer property of Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

MIGHTY MARVEL UPDATE

The syndicated **"NightMan"** television series has started strongly. According to figures from Platinum Studios, "NightMan" had the top first-episode ratings for all new syndicated series....The **"Nick Fury"** telefilm, set to air early next year on Fox, has been completed. Sources said the special effects for the movie, which stars David Hasselhoff, turned out well....The 64th and 65th episodes of **"Spider-Man,"** which close out the animated series, will be "I Really, Really Hate Clones" and "Farewell to Spider-Man." The both fit under the "Spider Wars" story umbrella and include Spider-Men from alternate realities.

"NightMan" has so far done well in syndication.

© 1997 Tribune Entertainment. Photo: Danny O'Connor.

THREE DARK HORSE DELIVERIES

Art Adams confirmed discussions are taking place for a possible animated project featuring his Dark Horse Comics creations, **Monkeyman and O'Brien**. "We were talking about a live-action motion picture at one point, too, but now it's just animation," he said. Adams said if the project becomes a reality, he would be involved in script and character design development.

In other Dark Horse news, Milcho Manchevski, who directed the Oscar-nominated "Before the Rain," has been tapped by New Line Cinema to write and direct **"Cross,"** the live-action film based on the Dark Horse series created by Andrew Vachss and James Colbert. "Cross," about a group of childhood friends who fight urban crime, will likely begin shooting next summer.

Also, Mike Allred, the creator of Dark Horse's fun-loving Madman, will have his independent **"Astroesque"** movie released on home video on Jan. 21. Allred wrote, produced, directed and stars in this full-length action-adventure sci-fi (and religious) film, which connects to his *Red Rocket 7* comic and is presented in letterbox format.

Meanwhile, another of the comic company's projects will soon be a memory: ABC canceled the science-fiction series **"Timecop"** after five episodes. The series, based on the Dark Horse comic book, suffered from poor ratings, placing fourth in its Monday-night time slot. "Timecop" was the first drama series of the new season to get the ax.

WOLFF AND BYRD PROBE THE MOVIES

Universal Pictures has purchased the movie rights to Batton Lash's *Wolff and Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre*, which is published by Exhibit A Press. The satirical comic features two lawyers, Alanna Wolff and Jeff

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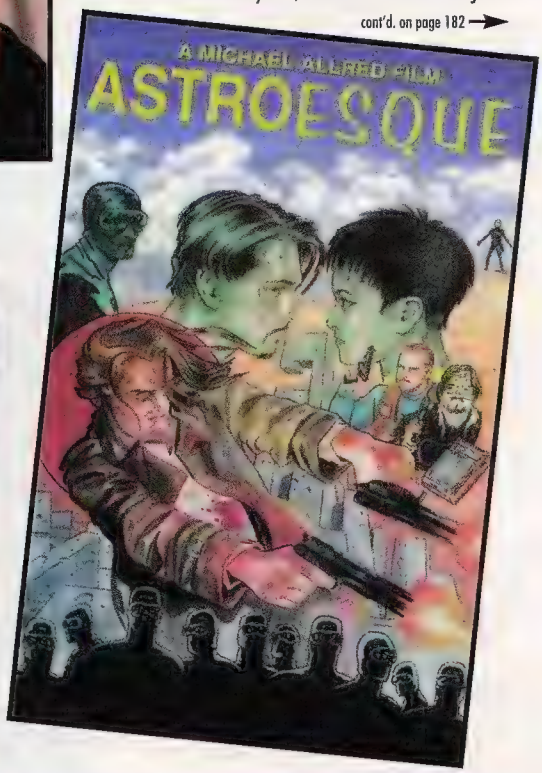

Adams (center) might pen the "Monkeyman and O'Brien" cartoon, while Allred's sci-fi film "Astroesque" hits video in January.

Celebrity Profile: LISA RINNA

Everett Collection

Maybe it's her crossed arms. Maybe it's the form-fitting black leather costume. Maybe it's the pissed-off facial expression with those famous lips and the slicked-back hair. Whatever the reason, Lisa Rinna looks damn tough on the set of the "Nick Fury" telefilm.

As Val, a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent and former flame of Fury, Rinna is confronting the agency's director when Fury pulls up next to her. She projects nothing but good-soldier attitude.

But, while setting up the next scene, in which David Hasselhoff's Fury will suddenly pull his gun and fire it, Rinna's tough exterior melts away.

"I hate guns!" she announces. "It's not going to spit back at me?"

"No," says Hasselhoff, waving the gun in the direction the casings will go—away from Rinna. "See this? It's going to go 'boom,' then right over there."

With that assurance, the scene is filmed and Rinna hangs tough next to the blam-blam-blam of the weapon. The firepower is part of Rinna's first real action role. Rinna, who currently stars in Fox's "Melrose Place," is playing hero in "Nick Fury," a telefilm based on the Marvel Comics character that's tentatively scheduled to air on Fox in either January or February.

Guns aside, Rinna said that she's having a blast as Val in an interview with *Wizard* between takes on the set in Surrey, British Columbia.

On her character: "Val can be a tough cookie. She works around all these men and she has to be [tough] in order to get any kind of respect. It's really interesting, what it has brought out in me and what it brings to Val…Val is very passionate, strong, intense, loving, intelligent—a no-B.S. type of person."

Why she decided to be in the movie: "Because it was a comic book. I read the script and it sounded like a lot of fun. I immediately responded to it."

On the movie's faithfulness: "The story comes directly from the comics. It's just a really well-written script. I think the fans of Nick Fury will be really happy because we've been able to create three-dimensional characters."

On Sandra Hess, who plays the film's villain, Viper: "Sandra and I have been friends a very long time. We hadn't seen much of each other recently, then we got this movie. Isn't that weird?"

On auditioning for "Nick Fury": "When I went into the room [to audition], I tried to sell myself as Viper. I dressed up in a unitard and the whole bit—making myself as tough as possible. And the minute I walked in, there was nothing I could have done. Their minds were set. I was Val and Val alone…I can see why."

On the film's budget, which is approaching $6 million: "There's a lot of money behind it for a TV-movie. It looks great—every bit a feature film. Rod Hardy, who's directing, is amazing. He has a vision and he's getting it to the screen with [the producers], of course, going, 'You can't do that. It will cost too much.' But he's doing it."

On a Fury follow-up: "It has sequel written all over it with the way it ends. We'll see. I can't imagine why not, but you never can really look too far ahead in this business because it's so fickle. But I enjoyed this. It's been fun." ■ *RA*

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Wolff & Byrd might hit the big screen soon.

Byrd, who represent freaks in various legal cases, in a strange mix of "**The X-Files**," "L.A. Law" and "Tales from the Crypt."

The script for the live-action movie, which is on Universal's fast track, is being written by Stephen Mazur ("Liar Liar") and Steve Wilson ("Tremors," "Wild Wild West"). "The working title is 'Supernatural Law,'" said Lash. "The producers are trying to convince Universal 'Wolff and Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre' would be better."

Nancy Roberts and Annabel Jankel are producers. Jankel might direct, but a director had not been attached at press time. There has been no casting yet.

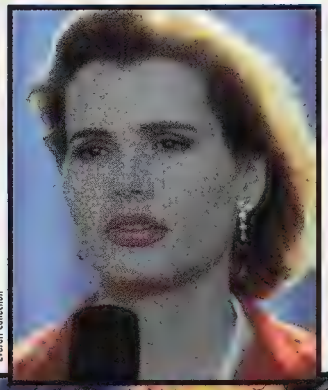
SHORT TAKES

A first cut of the "**Gen13**" direct-to-video animated movie has been completed. The film is expected to be released in early 1998....The ninth "**Star Trek**" movie is scheduled to begin filming in March. Jonathan Frakes, who plays Commander William Riker, will again direct. *Daily Variety* reports that Patrick Stewart will get $9.5 million to play Captain Jean-Luc Picard and Brent Spiner will get at least $5 million to play Data....**"South Park,"** the irreverent animated series and a breakout hit on Comedy Central, has been given a new 13-episode order by the cable network. Look for new episodes next year....According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, **Geena Davis** is in talks to star in a live-action adaptation of the Japanese animated television series **"Sailor Moon,"** which will be produced by Walt Disney Pictures. If the deal closes, Davis would play Queen Beryl, the nemesis of four high-school students who find out they are from outer space....Jimmy Palmiotti of Event Comics said the first draft of the script for the **"Ash"** animated movie has been completed and the film remains in preproduction. "Ash" is in line to be the fourth animated film from DreamWorks.... According to a Warner Bros. studio source, the **"Justice League of America"** telefilm for CBS is not considered dead, but "no new movement" had been made on the project for a series. Whether the movie will air on the network remains undetermined....Production on the next **Crow** movie, which has the working title "The Crow: 2037," could begin as early as March. Sources said production could take place in Prague in the Czech Republic. Rob Zombie is writer/director.... Gary Fleder, who directed "Kiss the Girls," has been attached to the **"A.K.A. Goldfish"** movie, based on the comic characters of Brian Michael Bendis (*Jinx*). Also in the works is a "Jinx" movie. Bendis is writing the first draft to "Goldfish" and will be executive producer. **W**

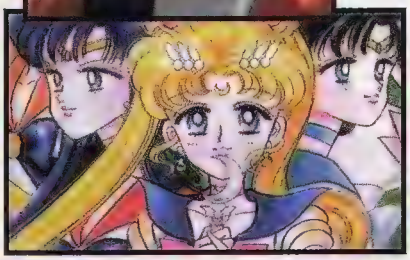
Comedy Central

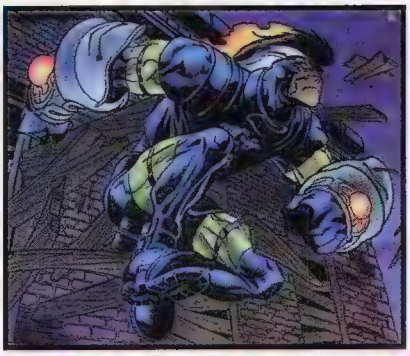
"Kick ass!" "South Park" is a hit and Comedy Central has ordered more episodes.

Geena Davis is in negotiations to be in a "Sailor Moon" flick.



Everett Collection





"Ash" is slated to be DreamWorks' fourth animated film.

Brent Spiner was about to settle for $4.5 million when a secret meeting with Detroit-based writer Rob Allstetter somehow inspired him to go for the big five.

BOX-OFFICE BREAKDOWN

Here's a look at how this year's Top 10 comic book-related and sci-fi films measured up against each other in box-office income. (Figures are as of press time.)

		Domestic Gross
1	"Men in Black"	$243.6 million
2	"The Lost World: Jurassic Park"	$229.1 million
3	"Star Wars" (during re-release)	$138.5 million
4	"Batman & Robin"	$107.9 million
5	"Hercules"	$ 96.3 million
6	"Spawn"	$ 53.9 million
7	"The Empire Strikes Back"	$ 45.5 million
8	"Return of the Jedi"	$ 45.4 million
9	"Kull the Conqueror"	$ 6.1 million
10	"Steel"	$ 1.8 million

ON THE LOOKOUT

A RUNDOWN OF FILM AND TV PROJECTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

"X-Men": Still waiting for a final script. Bryan Singer slated to direct for 20th Century Fox.

"Superman Lives": Nicolas Cage ("Con Air") will star as Warner Bros. launches a new era of Superman films in 1999. Director Tim Burton begins production in June. [See lead "Trailer Park" item.]

"Batman": Fifth movie will pit George Clooney's Caped Crusader against one villain. Warner Bros. is aiming for a 2000 release. [Also see lead item.]

"Witchblade": Top Cow's leading lady is set to star in a syndicated television series next fall.

"Hulk": The Universal film, featuring a completely computer-animated Hulk, should start production in Arizona in March under writer/director Jonathan Hensleigh. No casting yet.

"Nick Fury": The first in what could be a series of Fox telefilm airs in early 1998. David Hasselhoff ("Baywatch") plays Nick Fury, who takes on Sandra Hess' Viper.

"Silver Surfer": Fox's latest Marvel cartoon begins in February, with 13 episodes in the first season. [See item in main text.]

"Blade": Wesley Snipes ("Murder at 1600") stars in New Line's adaptation of Marvel's vampire hunter, due Feb. 13. Cast includes Stephen Dorff and Kris Kristofferson.

"Justice League of America": Pilot movie failed to make CBS' fall line-up. No word yet if the telefilm will air.

"Daredevil": Comics writer J.M. DeMatteis (*Spectacular Spider-Man*) is the latest scripter for this Fox film.

"Spider-Man": Movie rights still in litigation. Will writer/director James Cameron still be interested when the problems are unraveled?

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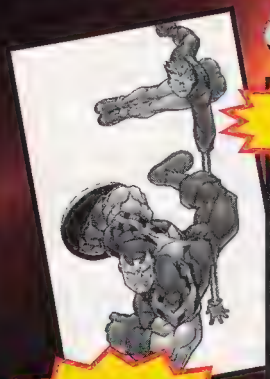
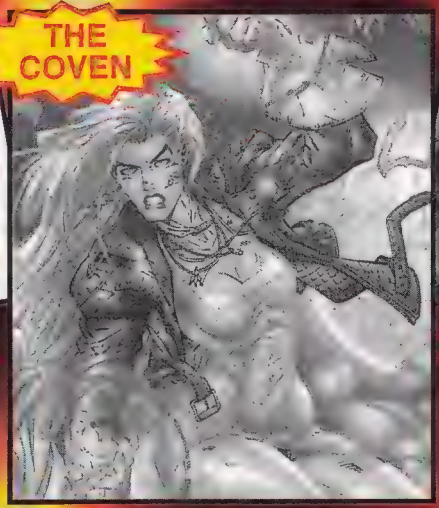
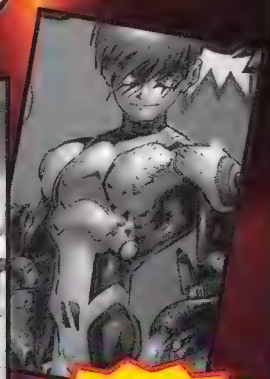


FIGHTING AMERICAN



THE COVEN



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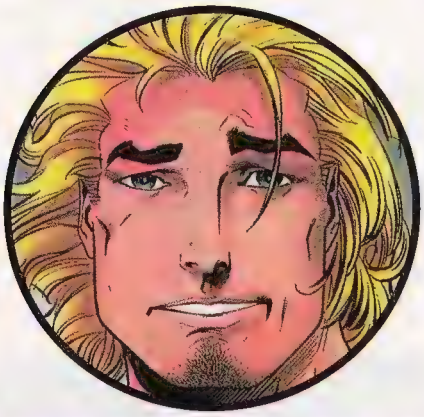
CHARACTER PROFILE

Ka-Zar

1997's Most Improved Character

BY MATTHEW BRADY



VITAL STATS

Real Name: Lord Kevin Plunder
Age: early 30s
Height: 6' 2"
Weight: 215
Hair Color: Blond
Eye Color: Blue
First Appearance: *Uncanny X-Men* #10
Title Currently Appearing in: *Ka-Zar*
Major Enemies: Parnival Plunder, Sauron, Magneto and the Savage Land Mutates, Belasco and Thanos

ORIGIN

Son of English nobleman Lord Robert Plunder, discoverer of Anti-Metal, young Kevin Plunder was separated from his brother Parnival when their father realized the danger the boys faced due to powers who would stop at nothing to get their hands on the metal's secrets. Taking Kevin to Antarctica's time-warped jungle setting, the Savage Land—home of Anti-Metal itself—Lord Plunder entrusted Parnival to the care of the family butler, who hid him in New York City.

Shortly after his and Kevin's arrival in the Savage Land, Lord Plunder was killed by the Man-Apes. Before the Apes could hurt Kevin, they were attacked by the saber-toothed tiger, Zabu, who helped Kevin escape. The two then lived together in a region of the Savage Land known as the Place of Mists. There, with Zabu's help, Kevin grew to know the Savage Land and its diverse native people, including Benza, a medicine man who taught Kevin of the Savage Land's interdependence upon itself.

Growing in stature and respect among the people, the natives renamed Kevin as Ka-Zar, which means "son of the tiger," and a legend of the Savage Land was born.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

As Kevin grew up in the Savage Land, he encountered many heroes, including the X-Men, Avengers, Spider-Man, Daredevil and the Hulk. Thanks to them, Kevin has learned much of the outside world, and has made journeys to New York several times.

Meanwhile, Parnival grew to hate Kevin, due mostly to lies told to him by the butler. Utilizing his portion of Anti-Metal, Parnival fashioned himself as a villain called the Plunderer. As the Plunderer, Parnival encountered many of the world's heroes, including his brother Kevin. During one of their battles, Parnival was mortally wounded and presumed dead.

One true joy in Kevin's life came when he met the American adventurer Shanna O'Hara, an explorer of the Savage Land. Over time, the two fell in love and were married. The two share a very close bond of love and friendship which has only deepened since the birth of their son, Matthew.

As he's become a father and matured, Kevin has become more of a guardian of the Savage Land. After several attacks on the Savage Land and its people, both by superhumans and multinational corporations intent on plundering the resources of the land, Kevin, with Zabu at his side, now zealously guards the Savage Land against intrusion by hostile visitors. He also diligently works to maintain a sustainable peace among its native people, and has been able to reject the technology of the civilized world in favor of his environment's more primal offerings.

Recently, it has come to light that Parnival is alive and still seeking to kill his brother. This time he has the aid of the cosmic villain Thanos, who wants the terraforming machinery of the Savage Land for his own ends. Parnival also orchestrated a vicious attack on Kevin by Gregor, the man who trained the infamous hunter, Kraven. During his attack, Gregor kidnapped Matthew, and threatened to kill him.

While Kevin ultimately defeated Gregor, he has realized that until he has dealt with Parnival for good, the hero's presence in the Savage Land will put his land and family at risk. With this in mind, Kevin and Shanna have recently relocated to New York City, where he can more easily deal with the threat posed by Parnival and Thanos.

Unfortunately, Thanos and Parnival have partially succeeded in their goals, and have managed to turn New York into a jungle with the aid of the terraforming technology. Meanwhile, without the machinery, the Savage Land is getting colder.

Also, due to Kevin's growing infatuation with technology, he and Shanna have begun to drift apart little by little. Realizing the danger he is in, and the danger to his relationship with Shanna, Kevin has grown more determined than ever to put things right with Shanna, and stop Parnival once and for all.

UPCOMING HIGHLIGHTS

According to *Ka-Zar* writer Mark Waid, the current "Urban Jungle" storyline (*Ka-Zar* #8-#10) that has Thanos and Parnival turning New York City into a jungle will wrap up Ka-Zar's first year, and fill in all the blanks readers have been wondering about. "All questions will be answered," Waid says. "Everything from why Ka-Zar has been acting so out of character and falling in love with technology, to what Parnival and Thanos' real plans are for Ka-Zar and Shanna—who may not even be talking to each other by then if their relationship keeps going the way it is now."

And after that? "You want more?!?" an exasperated Waid asks. "Okay, if Kevin and Shanna can stop Thanos without a casualty—something I wouldn't bet on—they've got to fix the Savage Land, where things are starting to die fairly quickly."

Following that, there is the question of who or what was under the terraforming machinery in the Savage Land back in issue #8. "I've found someone even scarier to pit Ka-Zar against. Considering that he's currently duking it out with Thanos, this guy's going to give Ka-Zar a *real* hard time. You want an idea of what the power levels will be like? Picture this: Ka-Zar versus God."

Following that little skirmish, keep on the lookout for some guest-stars, especially one with an "A" on his forehead.

RECOMMENDED HIGHLIGHTS

Does Ka-Zar give you jungle fever? Here's a couple of gems plucked straight from the vine:

- ***The Uncanny X-Men* #115-#116** (also available as reprints)—The bonds of true friendship between the X-Men and Ka-Zar strengthen as the mutants and the jungle guy have to join forces to save the Savage Land from Garokk. Classic stuff by Chris Claremont and John Byrne.
- ***The Incredible Hulk* #454**—Hulk, Ka-Zar and Wolverine all team up to take down a rogue dino and to keep warring tribes from killing each other. They don't quite succeed…
- ***Ka-Zar* #1-#3** (current series)—Setting the stage for the first year's worth of stories, young Matthew is kidnapped and Ka-Zar is forced to brave the Antarctic wilds to save him. The Savage Land's never looked better! (In fact, pick up the *next* three issues while you're at it—this series is just that groovy!)

North Carolina-based writer Matthew Brady once lived in the Savage Land, dressed only in a loincloth and acting like an aboriginal savage. After the infamous "swinging from the vines after Mexican Night" incident, Ka-Zar asked him to leave.

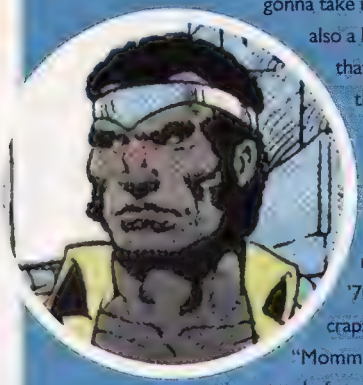
TOP 10 HEROES & VILLAINS OF THE MONTH

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

Hey! In tune with our "year-end" look ahead/look back motif, we've interrupted our regularly scheduled Top 10 Heroes & Villains list. Instead, we offer you a look at the most horribly " politically incorrect" characters of all time!

1) LUKE CAGE

Sweet Christmas! Luke Cage, Hero for Hire, is a tough-talkin', street-walkin', blaxploitation bad-ass from the ghetto who ain't gonna take no guff offa Whitey! He's also a horribly contrived rip-off that Marvel came up with in the early '70s to capitalize on the success of the first black action-hero movie, "Shaft." As such, he gets the full compliment of standard early '70s black hero stereotype crap: He's got an Afro, he said "Momma!" at least 12 times an issue, and of course, he's been to prison. Is there a bad stereotype untouched? Oh yeah, he never played in the NBA. Guess they missed one.

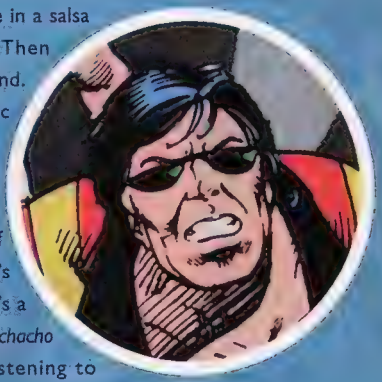


2) CANNONBALL

Well, gaw-lee, cousin! Sam Guthrie, or Cannonball as he's known to them city-slicker super-types, is the personification (Now *that's* a big school-learnin' word!) of white-trash hillbilly coal miners. Yessiree, he's a down-home good ol' boy from the mountains who probably drives a pickup truck with a gun rack and everything. And the best part? His power is the ability to blast himself into things and smash though 'em, effectively using his head as a giant battering ram! Now that's smart! Guess that's what generations of inbreeding and drinking your own home-made corn-squeezin' whiskey will do to ya.

3) VIBE

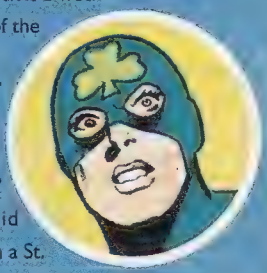
¡Ay, amigo! Vibe's got the grand trinity of bad Hispanic stereotypes. First, the name: Paco Ramone. With a handle like that, he oughta be playing vibraphone in a salsa band somewhere. Then there's his background. How do all Hispanic youths spend their free time? Why, running with a street gang called "Los Lobos," of course! And finally, he's got the attitude. Paco's a hot-headed *macho muchacho* who doesn't like listening to authority! Yeah, if Aquaman or one of them other ol' farts gives him any static, this volcanic Latino is liable to shove a prison-made shiv in his heart! This guy is everything you've ever seen in a "Cheech & Chong" movie brought to comics.



4) YELLOW CLAW

He's creepy! He's kooky! He's altogether spooky! No, he's not the Oriental Addams Family. He's the Yellow Claw and he represents fear of the East better than anything this side of spoiled sushi. Heck, he's even got a bad long-hair Oriental mustache! This cheeseball Chinese villain sports the whole package: He's a criminal mastermind, he's got a whole harem full of wives, he smokes opium and he can probably use chopsticks 10 times better than any white man. The icing on the cake? When the Marvel FBI assigned an agent to take down the Claw, who'd they get for the job? Some guy named Jimmy Woo, who we think owns the noodle shop down the street.

5) SHAMROCK



Faith and begorrah, ye boyos! Shamrock is a wee Irish lass who'd be carryin' the Luck of the Irish! Blessed be the Blarney stone! Let's turn off the "Lucky Charms" accent for a bit and ask a question: What the hell kind of ability is "luck" power? Can she avoid parking tickets? Pick winning lotto numbers? Avoid puking when she's drunk off her ass in a St. Paddy's Day parade? WE DON'T KNOW! She's so lame, she's nothing but a bad stereotype with no real ability.

6) RAGE

Oh, we get it. He's a young black man, therefore he's gotta be angry. So, we'll call him "Rage." To his credit, Rage was a rather heroic young lad who fought bravely alongside both the New Warriors and the Avengers, and he loved his grandmother dearly. But "Rage"? What kinda crummy-ass fear-of-a-black-planet name is that? What's next? An English guy named Lieutenant Limey? Maybe a Jewish guy called Tightwad? A slanty-eyed guy called Pieface? Hello?

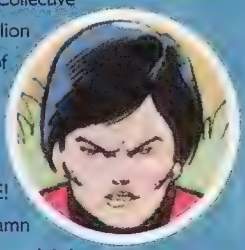
7) PIEFACE

Hello! Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner! Once upon a time (around the 1960's, that is), it was decided that Green Lantern needed a little buddy. Along came a character named Thomas Kalmuka. Now, instead of giving him a nice little superheroey codename like "Bucky" or "Robin," he was hung with the moniker of "Pieface." Why? Because he's Alaskan and he's got slanty eyes. That's all. No further reasoning needed.

8) BATROC

Batroc is French. That's all you need to know. He sucks hard, like all the French do. The French, for those of you just joining us, are snooty, smell bad and fold like a card table every time they're involved in a war. And what's their major contribution to the world? Penicillin, which'll be outdated by bigger, stronger viruses any minute now, not to mention the fact that it's just mold in the first place. Bite us collectively, you collective French!

9) THE COLLECTIVE MAN



Speaking o' collectives, there's the Collective Man. Y'see, there are about a billion people living in China. That's a lot of people. And the collective man is Chinese. Therefore, he can split his body into many Collective Men. Why? BECAUSE HE'S CHINESE! That's all! Don't ask any more damn questions! And just to prove those lowly third-world types are always low-class, he also wears a bad red tunic that went out of fashion about the same time "Gilligan's Island" was canceled.

10) BATMAN

Batman! Batman! He's the best-disguised racial stereotype of 'em all: He's The Man! He's a rich, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant who represents the landed-gentry, moneyed establishment that keeps us all down! And he probably belongs to the same country club as all those rich, mob-connected "criminals" he's trying to bring down. Talk about yer conflict of interest! He's probably oppressed numbers #1-#9 on this list alone! Death to Bruce Wayne! Storm Wayne Manor and tear it to the ground! Redistribute the wealth! Eat the rich! Power to the people!

MORT OF THE MONTH

Now it's time to look at the lamest character of the month, or, as we like to call 'em, the Mort of the Month!

MONSIEUR MALLAH

He's your worst friggin' nightmare: He's a French monkey with a gun! And from the looks of that bad bandanna, it looks like he's seen "Rambo" one too many times. It seems there was this French scientist who found a gorilla that was a little stronger and a little more agile than your average gorilla. So, being the genius French scientist that he was, he gave the big ape electroshock treatments until (don't ask us how) the gorilla's IQ increased to 178. The scientist named him "Monsieur Mallah," and then had a strong, agile, smart giant monkey to do evil and stuff. That's it.

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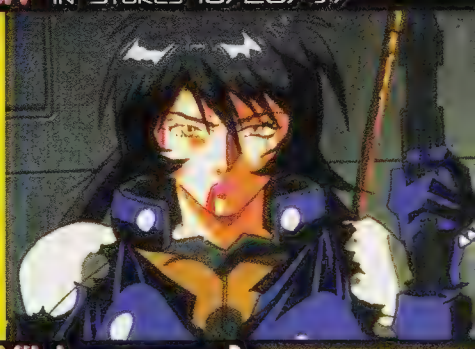

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$19.95 SRP

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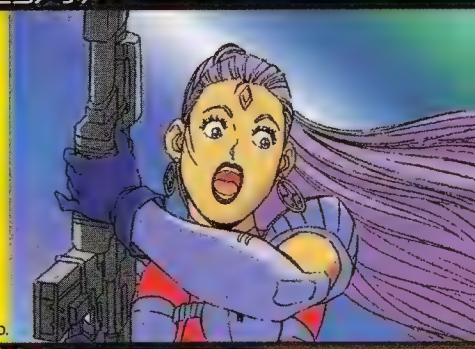

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MANGA SCENE

BY CARL GUSTAV HORN

A GUIDE TO JAPANESE COMICS AND ANIMATION BOTH PAST AND PRESENT

'GHOST' OF HONOR

The sci-fi epic 'Ghost in the Shell' questions the humanity of an information-laden future

Dead or alive? That's what Major Kusanagi (above) asks about her cyborg self.

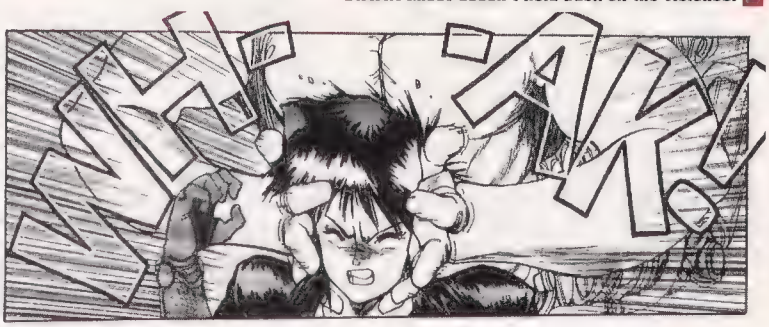
"Death is the only reality, and I'm a realist," says Major Mokoto Kusanagi, the heroine of Masamune Shirow's manga cyberpunk adventure *Ghost in the Shell*.

The Major knows a lot about death: It's all around her in 2029, as she leads the anti-terrorist special forces of Japan's Section Nine. And it's on her mind as well: Sometimes the Major thinks she died a long time ago, left her flesh behind and downloaded her soul into the beautiful cyborg shell she now inhabits. Is she now only a "ghost" in a material world?

Or, in a future where the flow of information through global networks threatens to dissolve cultures and countries, is a ghost more "real" than a body? This interface between the new reality of "pure" information and the age-old evils of mankind is also the battleground of *Ghost*. As Section Nine shoots it out with gangsters, corporations and even its own government, the Major thinks she's only looking for answers to a criminal conspiracy. But the most wanted criminal of all, the formless mind known as the "Puppet Master," has the answers she really wants—answers about her own identity. But what price will he ask for them?

Ghost, like Shirow's *Appleseed*, explores the notion of an "anti-escapist" future, in which technology creates neither a Heaven nor a Hell, but simply a set of new dangers and new opportunities, where a person must always be on guard or get swallowed

Dwww! *Ghost* doesn't hold back on the violence.



up by the system. In short, *Ghost*'s world is much like our own—a point Shirow likes to hammer home.

The satire Shirow presents can be harsh; there's a scene set in an overcrowded prison for robots during which various explanations are discussed for these machines going crazy. It might be the fear of being replaced and scrapped, information overload causing a deadening of their spirits, or rampant commercialism amplifying mental illness—whatever the problem, these robots of 2029 begin to sound a lot like the violent, anxious, downsizable humans of 1997.

This is one of the brainier manga out there—but most of the time those brains are splattered on a wall. Somewhat like Vertigo/DC's *Preacher*, *Ghost*'s quest for a higher truth gets sidelined a lot by ultra-violence and grisly humor. The Major gets her limbs severed, is shot full of holes and is even blown to bits (by a hitman with a wad of plastic explosive and a sack of nails stuffed down his trouser fly)—but she's always got Section Nine to staple her back together.

How does the well-known anime version of *Ghost* (released through Manga Entertainment) compare to the original comic? Only about a quarter of the manga story was used in the film—but the reader is likely to notice even more how, good as the film is, its darkened, understated mood is something invented for the anime. It's not often that a movie based on a comic feels more serious than the comic, but *Ghost*'s screen version is an ironic exception.

There's no doubt that *Ghost*, like all of Shirow's manga, is sometimes tough to understand as a story, even if it's always cool to simply look at—Shirow himself admits he doesn't understand all of his own dialogue! But if he has trouble finishing thoughts, it's because he's still thinking, and has no simple answers. W

California-based writer Carl Horn almost had a bit part in the upcoming "Godzilla" film, but his audition line of "Aaaiiiieeeee!" was deemed too emotional.

Want more violence? How 'bout severed limbs, splattered brains and expensive stuff that goes "WH-KROOM"?

F.Y.I.

Ghost was first released by Dark Horse in 1995 as eight issues with a cover price of $3.95 each, and was compiled later that year as a 368-page graphic novel for $24.95 (adding a color gallery of all the covers and a Shirow bio, but leaving out a drawing and pin-up of the Major that appeared in issue #8). Note that two important things are missing from the first printing of the graphic novel that were in the original issues: the page numbers (making the end section of story footnotes harder to use), and the warning that the footnotes "are not to be taken as fact."

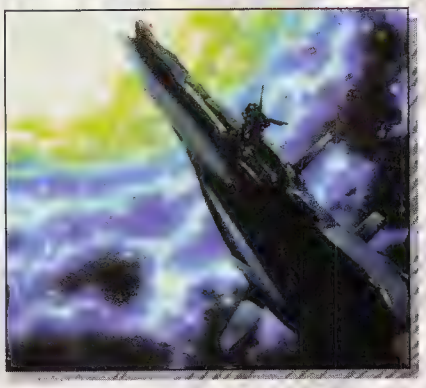
ANIME PICK OF THE MONTH

The Irresponsible Captain Tylor

(The Right Stuf, subtitled, 2 vols. out now, each 100 mins. and $19.95 U.S., now available)

In "Starship Troopers," a young man enlists in the space force of the future, and studies patriotism as a gung-ho soldier defending the human race against aliens in an interstellar war.

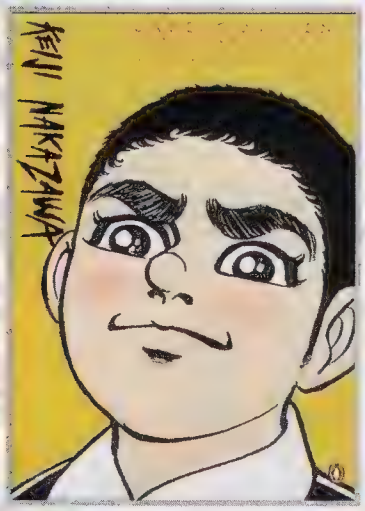
"The Irresponsible Captain Tylor" is just like that, except it's about a young man who enlists in the space force of the future, pondering a path to a cushy desk job and a nice pension as a lazy slacker defending his "401(k)" plan. Too bad, then, about those aliens and that interstellar war. But don't worry about Tylor, even though a glitch of fate has put him in command of the battleship *Soyokaze*, and right in the line of fire. In his single-minded pursuit of an easier way of life, he can charm and disarm, and if it takes becoming a hero in order to chill out, he'll do it the only way he knows how—with as little effort as possible! Find out why "Captain Tylor" has been one of the most fan-requested shows of the past few years—and at five bucks per episode (you get four in each video), the price is hard to beat!



MANGA PICKS OF THE MONTH
Must-read manga books shipping in December

Armored Trooper Votoms: Supreme Survivor
CPM Manga

This American adaptation of the hard-boiled anime epic "Votoms," with its story of a betrayed soldier on the long, hard road to the truth, is a 112-page graphic novel "prequel" to the TV series. Both story and art are by top Votoms expert Tim Eldred, who in *Supreme Survivor* opens the file on Armored Trooper mecha pilot Chirico Cuvie's training upon joining the killer elite of the Red Shoulder Battalion. An original story not told elsewhere, *Supreme Survivor* is an excellent introduction to the "Votoms" anime released through Central Park Media.



Barefoot Gen Graphic Novels #1-#4
Last Gasp of San Francisco

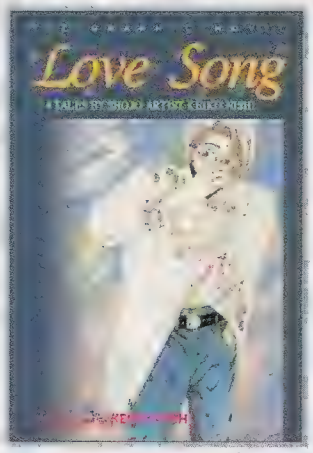
So grim, so true, so real: Last Gasp of San Francisco has just reprinted *Barefoot Gen*, a story of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima based on the experiences of artist and writer Keiji Nakazawa. With *Gen*, Nakazawa isn't jerking the reader's chain—unlike so many of today's creators of "dark" comics, he actually lived through the apocalypse of Hiroshima. In *Gen*, the hellish, sickening aftermath of the bombing is horrifying, and Nakazawa's blunt "cartoony" style only adds to the horror. *Gen* is both a cautionary tale and an adventure about ordinary people learning how to survive while caught between the genocidal machines of total war. These graphic novels are for mature readers only.

Blade of the Immortal: Dreamsong #6 (of 7)
Dark Horse Comics

The body of the cynical master swordsman, Manji the Immortal, is his own personal black joke: It's riddled with sacred worms slowly stitching up his most hideous wounds. He's a butcher on a rendezvous with grace, and perhaps, death at long last, as the love-haunted geisha Makie hacks the Immortal to pieces in a dance of whirling blades. Has she granted him release, and in doing so, damned herself? *Blade* writer/artist Hiroaki Samura's vibrant, slashing linework seems simultaneously rough and delicate, creating one of the most distinctive styles in manga today.

Cutie Honey #1
Studio Ironcat

Celebrate the 30th anniversary of the wild career of manga and anime legend Go Nagai ("Devilman," "Violence Jack," "Tranzor Z") with the first U.S. publication of his ultimate heroine: Cutie Honey. Honey is a sword-wielding female android crimefighter with the power to convert the air around her bare skin into any kind of costume—a process dubbed the "Honey Flash." Both issues #1 and #2 of *Cutie Honey* feature beautiful airbrushed covers by the internationally renowned artist Hajime Sorayama. This title is for mature readers only. Be sure to check out the anime from A.D.V. Films.



Love Song
Viz Comics

This graphic novel collects four stories written and drawn by Keiko Nishi. Although Nishi can be as "pretty" and "delicate" an artist as Kosuke Fujishima (*Oh My Goddess!*), her comics are a confrontation, not an escape. Whether her setting is comedy, horror, science fiction or the surreal setting of college life, she can strip people down to their bare emotions, knowing you can play every note there is on the human heart.

Oh My Goddess! Special: You're So Bad
Dark Horse Comics

In a pitiless world, *Oh My Goddess!* is one story that proves the power of being good-natured—just like Skuld, the youngest of the three goddesses in student Keiichi's life. Skuld's a good-hearted goddess, but right now, she's pretty sure she's in love with her sister Belldandy's boyfriend—Keiichi. And she's going to prove it by asking him out on a date! Can Belldandy keep her confused little sister's heart from being hurt, especially with big sister Urd planning a little mean-spirited sabotage? Watch the anime from AnimEigo!

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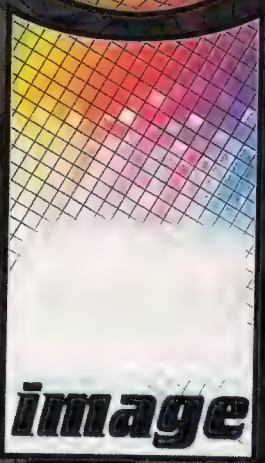
Image Comics Presents:

IT BETTER BE COOL...

The "Design the Image T-shirt!"

Image Comics, home of Spawn, Witchblade, Astro City, Gen13, Divine Right and too many other cool books to list here, wants you to design its official 1998 company T-shirt!



Using the Image logo and its incredible stable of characters, create a design that best exhibits the excitement you can see in Image comics. Creativity, not necessarily artistic ability, is what counts—so get crackin'! The most creative and innovative designs will win wild prizes!

WHAT YOU CAN WIN:

Grand Prize (1):

One aspiring artist will see his or her design become the official Image T-shirt, and it will be drawn by one of Image's many talented artists. The Grand Prize winner also gets the art, which will be signed by the Image partners. This lucky winner also receives a full year's subscription to a whole slew of Image Comics! Image-ine that!

First Prize (10):

Ten almost-as-lucky winners get an official Image Comics T-shirt and a set of Image Comics signed by the Image partners. Image is everything!

Second Prize (20):

Twenty Second Prizers get an official Image Comics T-shirt. Hey, at least you won't catch cold.

This contest is sponsored by the coolest people on the left coast, Image Comics.

Fill this out, attach your entry and put it in an envelope. Send it to: "Design the Image T-shirt!" Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

Deadline is January 30, 1998!

Spitting Legal

No purchase necessary. Contest is open to anyone except employees of Wizard Press, Image Comics, their immediate families and...and...damn. We're stuck for a joke here. Ah, well. Print your name, date of birth, address, city, state, zip and telephone number with area code on the official entry form or a 3-by-5-inch index card, and attach the form or card to your entry. Enter as many times as you like. Mail each entry separately to: "Design the Image T-shirt!" Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118. No mechanical reproductions of completed forms are accepted, but you can photocopy the entry form before filling it out if you don't want to mess up your magazine. All entries become property of Wizard Press and none will be returned. All taxes (federal, state and local, if any) will be the responsibility of the prize winners. No cash equivalent or substitute prizes will be offered. Prizes are awarded in the names of the contest winners and are not transferable. We like underwear that's fun to wear. Offer void where prohibited, regulated or restricted by law in a manner inconsistent with the purposes and rules hereof. **All entries must be received at contest headquarters by January 30, 1998.** Wizard Press is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Odds of winning will be determined by the number of valid entries received prior to the closing date of the contest. Prize winners will be selected based on originality and creativity by Wizard Press. Winning entries will be selected on or about February 13, 1998. For a list of winners, available after February 13, 1998, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: "Design the Image T-shirt!" Winners List, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

Design the T-shirt Entry Form

DEADLINE IS JANUARY 30, 1998!

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number (with area code) _____

Did you attach your entry?

By Joyce M. Steel

Holy Cow! It's The Set of the Year

Greetings fellow card fans, and welcome to 1997's official year-end card review. With more than 100 sets produced this year, pickin' the best of the best was no picnic. But we did manage to agree on the top three of '97, and here they are—in order:

1. Top Cow Showcase: The Painted Cow

(Comic Images/Top Cow Cards)

It's how cards are done! Start off with a whole universe of some of modern comics most exciting characters like Witchblade, The Darkness and the fine folks of Cyber Force. Grab a bunch of the industry's best painters, like Joe Chiodo, J. D. Smith and Dean White, and make 'em do a bunch of paintings of those characters exclusively for the card set. Then make 'em tell you in their own words what they were thinkin' when they did it. Add Chromium Cards drawn by Mike Turner, Marc Silvestri, Brandon Peterson and David Finch. Dab it with the art production on this set, which is primo. Combine all of this and you got yourself the best-lookin' card set of 1997.

2. Marvel QFX

(Fleer/SkyBox)

Again, we just loooove original artwork by amazing talents on our cards, and Joe Quesada sure fits the bill! QFX goes even a step further, infusing Quesada's illustrations with photographic background shots of Manhattan. So even though there have been a bazillion Marvel card sets, QFX livens it up pretty darn good. It's cool to see a Quesada-drawn Spider-Man swinging around the skyline of the real New York City. It's a different take on an old concept.

3. Spider-Man Premium

(Fleer/SkyBox)

For all you web-slinger fans who've cleared out at least three rooms in yer homes for the umpteen Spidey card sets that have come your way: here's number umpteen-and-one. But fans will find a special spot on the shelves for this baby, as it shows off a timeline of comic art from pencils and old-time art styles to the recent adaptation of airbrush and mixed media into art. And having the likes of two John Romitas (Jr. and Sr.) and a Joe Kubert doin' the art doesn't hurt either.

And there you have the top three! 'Course that kinda stiffs a whole lotta great sets, and we can't have that now, can we? NOOOO! So here's the rest of *Wizard's* zany card categories:

CARD SET FOR ART LOVERS: X-Men 2099 Oasis

(Fleer/SkyBox)

Ninety—count 'em, 90—brand-new paintings from fantasy artists Greg and Tim Hildebrandt. 'Nuff said.

COOLEST CHROMIUM SET: The Tenth

(Krome Productions)

Tony Daniel's got plenty of experience with weird, hellish comics, having worked on *Spawn* and *Witchblade* before creating and penciling *The Tenth*. And Beau Smith's writing work on *Spawn* made him a natural to pen Daniels' new story. Their excellent teamwork translated quite nicely to this nifty new Chromium series.

FABBEST FLICK SET: Spawn

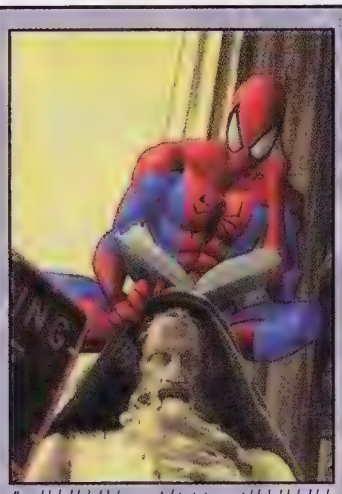
(Inkworks)

Let's face it: fans couldn't wait for Todd McFarlane's soldier from Hell to hit the silver screen. And the card set does a swell job of reviewing the flick's best parts (what few there were), and even provides the behind-the-scenes skinny (particularly showcasing ILM's special effects genius) and character profiles.

SPEEDIEST SET: Star Wars Vehicles

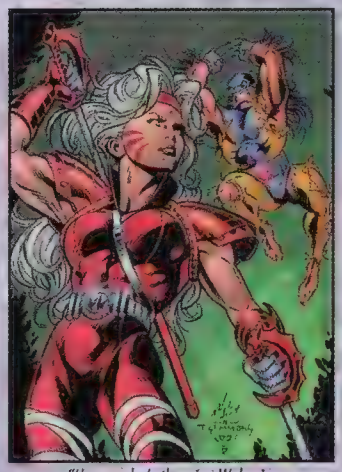
(Topps)

1997 was a big year for "Star Wars," and Topps did produce *one* series based on the re-release of the original trilogy. Sure, one doesn't sound like many, but we should praise Topps for not beating a concept to death. And that one idea they was a rather swift idea. Top Cow artists, including Marc Silvestri, lent their talents to the all-original-art set, which I'd hop right into my X-Wing Fighter and go find if I were you!



"...blah blah blah copyright statement blah blah blah trademark breach...damn! Marvel does own me!"
Spider-Man .99 cards

"It's true! If you bash a hundred Certs into your head in the dark, your scalp glows!"
Evil Ernie: Master of Annihilation



"Hey...who's throwing Wolverine action figures at me?"
Marvel vs. WildStorm cards

RACIEST SET:
WildStorm Lingerie Collection
(WildStorm)

With the skimpy costumes these characters are always bouncin' around in, WildStorm actually managed to cover up more skin by puttin' 'em in their lingerie. What a feat.

MOST POSTAL CARDMAKER:
Krome Productions

Between releasing their third *Evil Ernie* series ("Master of Annihilation"), and squeezing every last sellable ounce outta Lady Death with her fourth set (Mega Chromium preview set and full series) in '97, these folks have the morbid market all laced up. If you go for that sorta thing, them *Mega Chromium Lady Death* cards especially can't be beat.

CLASH OF THE YEAR:
Marvel vs. WildStorm
(Fleer/SkyBox)

On the same level as *Marvel Versus DC*, this set may have even been a bit more original. It's more than plain ol' warfare and good guys versus bad guys. There's tons of original art with unusual scenarios like heroes pitted against heroes and villains joining forces to wreak super-potent havoc on both universes.

YA WANNA PLAY:
Dilbert's Corporate Shuffle collectible card game
(Wizards of the Coast)

If you don't have a job, you just won't get it.

YA GOTTA PAY:
WildStorm Premium Signature Cards
(WildStorm)

If you're a rich fanboy, you'll want two of each. The hefty $49.95 price tag is the only deterrent, however; the hand-signed Jim Lee Voodoo/Zealot card is a beauty.

DECEMBER, 1997 AND BEYOND!

But wait: there's more! Let's take a look at sets we couldn't review 'cause they weren't out before press time, but we're psyched to see:

1. *Vampirella: Blood Lust* (Comic Images)
Joe Jusko does some Vampi. The set's based on the summer's two-book series that brought Vampi fans back to Drakulon. Totally mesmerizing, man! TOTALLY! Jusko at his best! (eight cards per pack, suggested retail price $1.99)

2. *Widow* (Bolt Entertainment) If for nothing else, but the RED LEATHER CARDS! Curious? Check it out! (eight cards per pack, suggested retail $1.99)

3. All that Dart Flipcards stuff... There's a Sailor Moon prism set in November, Munsters in December, and the long-awaited Gilligan's Island set in January. (All sets are six cards per pack, suggested retail price $1-$2.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, what's the start of a brandy-spankin' new year without a few new year's wishes? Here's what'd make '98 one of the best card collectin' years ever:

- No more "Melrose Place" card sets.
- Cardmakers stopping before series #18 of the same old same-old.
- Lots more great comic artists and writers doin' original art for the medium we love best: Cards!

Freelance writer Joyce Steel will always think of 1997 as the year of pudding and Jell-O, but for reasons known only to her.

Breakbeat techno that's a quick fix for drum addicts, and a big hit for beatjunkies.

"...currently cooler than an Eskimo's icebox in big beat circles." -NME

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***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the country's hottest back issues. The following comics burned up the charts throughout 1997.**

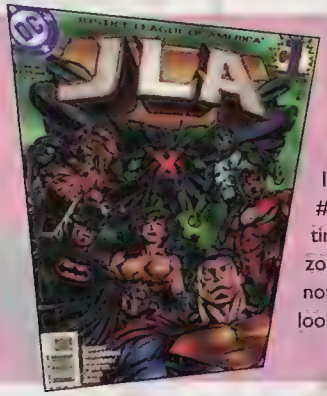
Top 10 Comics of 1997

Hey! These ain't no regular "Top 10 Comics" of any ol' month! They're the Top 10 Comics of the whole *year*, based on the rankings of "Top 10 Comics" over the past 12 months!

1. WITCHBLADE #1

WRITERS: David Wohl, Brian Haberlin and Christina Z.
ARTISTS: Michael Turner and D-Tron

Topping our chart for the year is the ever-present *Witchblade* #1. Not only did this here comic featuring Witchy-Poo appear on the list every stinkin' month in 1997, but it even occupied the No. 1 slot for an incredible *five* months! So what makes the book so darned popular? Well, as near as we can tell, the art is beyond gorgeous, the writing team does a great job of setting up a monster cliffhanger at the end of every issue, and Ms. Sara Pezzini is fond of wearing dresses approximately the size of two Bounty paper towels taped together. And we don't mean the extra-size Bounty, either.



2. JLA #1

WRITER: Grant Morrison
ARTISTS: Howard Porter and John Dell

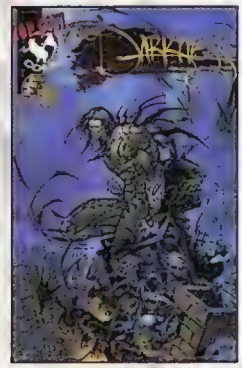
It shouldn't be rerun season yet, but *JLA* #1 is a bit of a repeat of our first entry. Y'see, *JLA* #1 also appeared on the list every month in 1997. And it also occupied the No. 1 slot five times. So why is it looking up at *Witchblade* #1? Well, it hung around the No. 5-to-No. 10 zone early in the year, and thus its total score is a bit lower than *Witchblade* #1's. But that's not to say that *JLA* #1 ain't a darned fine funnybook in its own right. And it's not to say that looking up at Witchblade is a bad place to be. We can think of lots of worse spots.

3. DARKCHYLDE #1

WRITER: Randy Queen
ARTISTS: Randy Queen, Jason Gorder and Marlo Alquiza

And then there's *Darkchylde* #1. Ms. Ariel Chylde captivated readers' imaginations this year, and when you combine that with the fact that *Darkchylde* #1 was a middle-of-the-road book from the now-defunct Maximum Press when it came out, you'll see that there ain't too many copies out there. Hence, ya get a big back-issue demand. And speakin' o' big, have ya checked out the Darkrack lately? What's she sportin', a set of 38s with a 19-inch waist? Yeesh. We bet she's got worse back problems than a field full of cabbage pickers.

NUMBER THREE



NUMBER FOUR

4. THE DARKNESS #1

WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTISTS: Marc Silvestri and Batt

The Darkness #1 was the unscrewable pooch. That is to say, there was absolutely, positively no way it *couldn't* have been a hit. Think about it: Your writer is Garth Ennis, one of the most popular scribes found on the planet today. Your penciler is Marc Silvestri, Big Bull of the Top Cow pasture. Your theme is a power related to the Cow's already white-hot Witchblade. The only thing that could have derailed *The Darkness* was the mysterious weather phenomenon called *El Niño*, which didn't hit until months after #1 had sold out. Case closed.

NUMBER FIVE

5. PREACHER #1

WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTIST: Steve Dillon

Oh, yeah—that most popular Ennis guy. He'd been floating around for years, on titles like *Hellblazer* and *The Demon*, but it was on the creator-owned *Preacher* that he finally tickled everyone's fancy. The tale of Jesse Custer, the man powered by the Word of God who's out to find God and make him return to Heaven, caught everyone's interest with its powerful, frank dialogue and over-the-top violence. And as to that whole fancy-tickling thing, don't worry: It's perfectly legal in Ennis' native United Kingdom, provided you're over 21.

6. FANTASTIC FOUR #1

WRITERS: Jim Lee and Brandon Choi
ARTISTS: Jim Lee and Scott Williams

It's kinda screwy. The new "Heroes Reborn" *Fantastic Four* #1 was basically a retelling of the classic 1961 version of *FF* #1. Reed Richards, boy genius, made the same ol' mistake of hopping on an untested spacecraft with his friend, his girlie and his girlie's little brother and getting zonked with more cosmic radiation than you'd need to microwave 53 metric tons of Jeno's pizza rolls. And people still bought it up! Just goes ta show you "Reborn" and that Jim Lee guy had a lot of drawing power.

NUMBER SIX

NUMBER SEVEN

7. JLA #2

WRITER: Grant Morrison
ARTISTS: Howard Porter and John Dell

JLA has become the dance sensation that's swept the nation. It's bigger than the Charleston, the Bugaloo, the Peppermint Twist and the Electric Slide. Fans dig the beat of the always-offbeat Grant Morrison, the up-tempo rhythm of the art and the fact that the cast is an all-star jam. DC's big players like Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash and Aquaman are the lyrics. It's like one-stop shopping for all your favorite DC Universe characters—and that's music to the ears of readers everywhere.

8. THE DARKNESS #0

WRITERS: David Wohl and Christina Z.
ARTISTS: Marc Silvestri, Michael Turner, D-Tron and Batt

Speaking, as we were earlier, of unscrewable pooches, here's another. *Witchblade* #10 is actually *The Darkness* #0. See, just before *The Darkness* #1 was released, our Top Cow buddies wanted to give it a big send-off. So they launched the megahit-to-be *The Darkness* through the pages of the already-megahit *Witchblade*. One in every four *Witchblade* #10s came with this spiffy-swell *Darkness* #0 variant cover, sending slobbering fanboys everywhere scrambling for copies of the Next Big Thing. Some may think it was overmilking the Cow, but hey—it worked!

NUMBER EIGHT

9. WITCHBLADE #2

WRITERS: David Wohl, Brian Haberlin and Christina Z.
ARTISTS: Michael Turner and D-Tron

NUMBER NINE

Okay, maybe her dresses are a *little* larger than two Bounty paper towels, but they sure ain't much bigger than your average welcome mat. And where's she get things like that tailored, anyway? Maybe it doesn't matter, 'cause as you can see on the cover here, the Witchblade gauntlet kinda makes an armor on Sara that just...grows on her. Only problem is, it looks sorta crusty, like a bad rash or something. It's not too attractive. You'd think Sara would pick up an ointment or something for that.

10. HITMAN #1

WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTIST: John McCrea

And rounding out our li'l year-end lovefest is *Hitman* #1, the book that launched a thousand atrocities. After all, where can you see Indian food vomited up on Batman's boots, a "hero" who uses his X-ray vision to scope out what the chickees *really* look like under their clothing, and the "Cat-Signal," a dead cat on a spotlight used to summon Catwoman? Only in *Hitman*, where all this and more is carried off with a sense of humor you might find surprising. Hey, it's more fun than nude dwarf Crisco Twister!

NUMBER TEN

top 10 comics

IF'N THIS HAD BEEN A REGULAR MONTH, THESE WOULD'VE BEEN THE BOOKS YOU'D A-BEEN READIN' 'BOUT UP THERE

1. JLA #1 DC
2. JLA #2 DC
3. WITCHBLADE #1 TOP COW/IMAGE
4. THE DARKNESS #1 TOP COW/IMAGE
5. DARKCHYLDE #1 MAXIMUM
6. BATMAN: THE LONG HALLOWEEN #1 DC
7. ASTRO CITY (VOL. 2) #1 HOMAGE/IMAGE
8. THUNDERBOLTS #1 MARVEL
9. CURSE OF THE SPAWN #1 IMAGE
10. ALPHA FLIGHT #1 MARVEL

The "Chasing Chase" DC Knowledge Contest

CONTEST

Her name is Cameron Chase and she is an operative for the Department of Extranormal Operations. Her job: monitor superheroes. But there's a catch... Chase has a secret as well.

Use the clues provided below to answer this question: What kind of mysterious ability does Chase have that she doesn't want anyone to know about?

The selected letters in each clue answer can be put together to reveal Chase's secret.

CLUES

1) The occupation of Bruce Wayne's father.

2) The location of Superman's secret base.

3) What Wonder Woman was made from.

4) Gives all super-speedsters like the Flash their speed.

5) The present Green Lantern's secret identity.

6) This type of sea creature raised Aquaman.

7) Name of the JLA's moon base.

If you're lucky, Chase will offer you these prizes to keep you quiet.

PRIZES

Grand Prize (1):

One lucky Chaser will be drawn into an upcoming issue of *Chase* by artists J.H. Williams III and Mick Gray. You'll also receive the page of Chase art that he appears in, and a copy of *Batman* #550 (featuring Chase's first appearance) and *Chase* #1 signed by Chase's creators J.H. Williams III, D. Curtis Johnson, and Mick Gray. The chase is on!

Second Prize (20):

Twenty Second Prizers will receive a copy of Chase #1 and *Batman* #550 signed by the *Chase* team of J.H. Williams III, D. Curtis Johnson, and Mick Gray. Worth Chasing!

Fill this out, attach your entry and put it in an envelope. Send to: "Chasing Chase" Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118. Deadline is January 30, 1998.

CHASE

This month's contest is sponsored by DC Comics, and DC stands for darn cool!

The Legal Paper Chase

No purchase necessary. Contest is open to anyone except employees of Wizard Press, DC Comics, their immediate families, and Bibbo Bibbowski. He says "youse" WAY too much to be a role model for kids. Print your name, date of birth, address, city, state, zip and telephone number with area code on the official entry form or a 3-by-5-inch index card, and attach the form or card to your entry. Enter as many times as you like. Mail each entry separately to: Chasing Chase Contest, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118. No mechanical reproductions of completed forms are accepted, but you can photocopy the entry form before filling it out if you don't want to mess up your magazine. All entries become property of Wizard Press and none will be returned. All taxes (federal, state and local, if any) will be the responsibility of the prize winners. No cash equivalent or substitute prizes will be offered. Prizes are awarded in the names of the contest winners and are not transferable. Offer void where prohibited, regulated or restricted by law in a manner inconsistent with the purposes and rules hereof. **All entries must be received at contest headquarters by January 30, 1998.** Wizard Press is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Odds of winning will be determined by the number of valid entries received prior to the closing date of the contest. Prize winners will be randomly selected from among all properly completed entries by Wizard Press. Winning entries will be selected on or about February 13, 1998.

Chase, DC Comics and all related characters ™ & © 1997 DC Comics. All rights reserved.

For a list of winners, available after February 13, 1998, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: "Chasing Chase" Winners List, c/o Wizard Press, P.O. Box 118, Congers, NY 10920-0118.

The "Chasing Chase" Contest Entry Form

DEADLINE IS JANUARY 30, 1998!

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number (with area code) _____

CLUE ANSWERS:

1 [ ][ ][4][11][ ][ ]

2 [ ][ ][13][ ][8][ ]

3 [ ][ ][ ][3][ ]

4 [2][ ][ ][ ][ ] [ ][6][ ][ ][ ]

5 [7][ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ][10][ ]

6 [ ][ ][ ][1][ ][12][9]

7 [ ][ ][ ][ ][5][ ][ ][ ][ ]

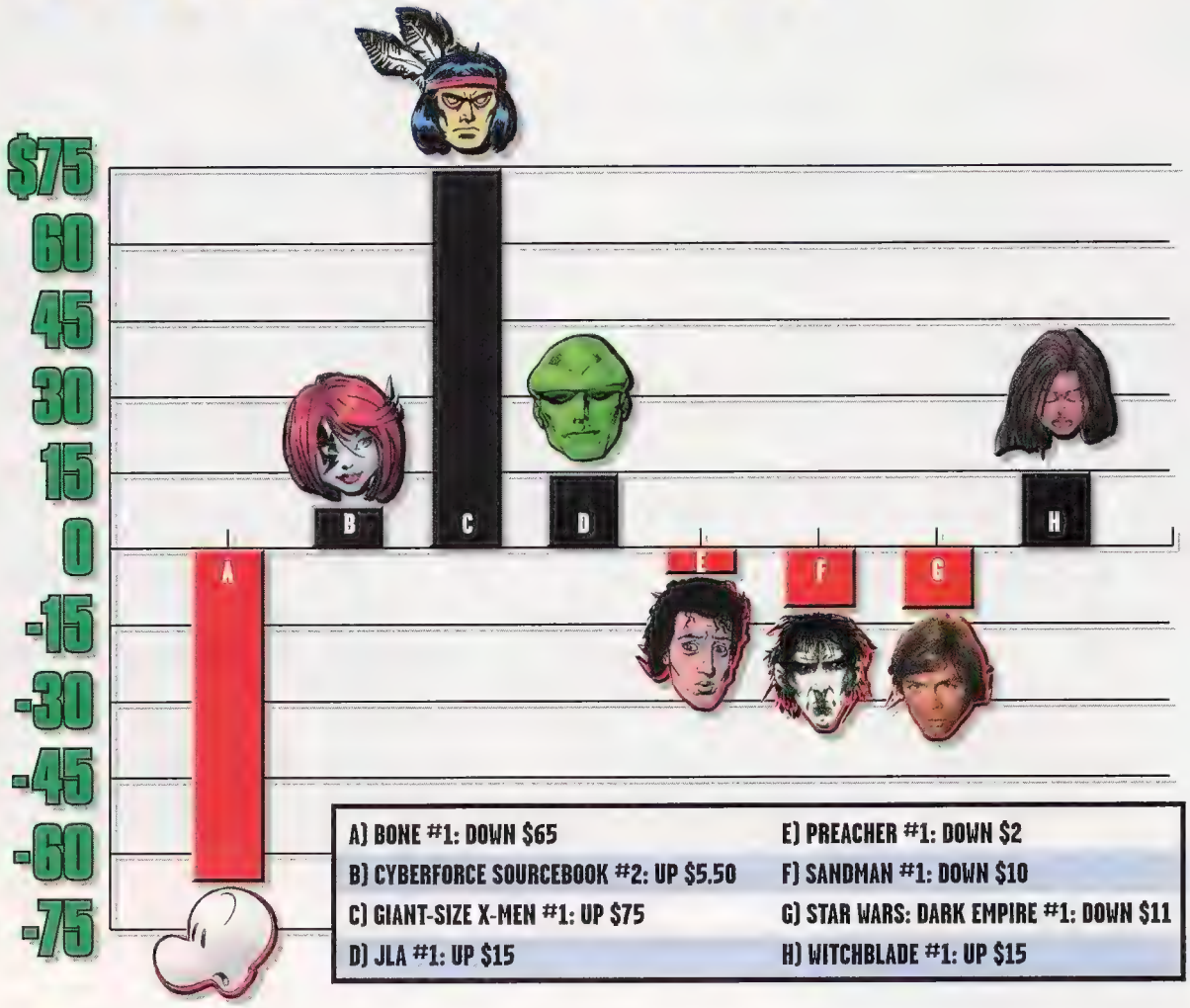
CHASE ANSWER:

[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10][11][12][13]

MARKET WATCH

COMIC MARKET NEWS AND SUCH • By Lars Pearson

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF 1997



It's been, as usual, a volatile year in the back-issue market. Here's a look at some of the biggest price movers of 1997, complete with reasons *why* they moved:

• **BONE #1** (Cartoon Books): The original *Bone* #1 nose-dived from $225 to $160 in 1997, largely because only three new issues of *Bone* were published in '97. The phrase "out of sight, out of mind" applies here. Besides, issue #1 is available in 10 printings, meaning people don't have to fork over hundreds for an original.

• **CYBERFORCE SOURCEBOOK #2** (Top Cow/Image): Proof you never know what's going to be important. This puppy was total bin cheese—until someone realized it had a Darkness pin-up that pre-dates the ongoing *Darkness* series by almost two years. It isn't the first Darkness appearance—since pin-ups don't "count"—but fans still dig it.

• **GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1** (Marvel): Ever notice how key first-appearance books such as this (first new X-Men) or *Incredible Hulk* #181 (first Wolverine) have a hard time going down in value? There's *always* a strong demand for comic milestones like these.

• **JLA #1** (DC Comics): The late-1996 reunion of DC's top characters posts a $15 gain for the year. Creator turnover will probably decide this one's fate. So long as writer Grant Morrison and artist Howard Porter stay on the title, the story that began in *JLA* #1 is essentially unbroken. If they suddenly leave, *JLA* values could take a hit.

• **PREACHER #1** (Vertigo/DC Comics): A mere $2 drop says so much. Compared to a whopping $33.50 gain in 1996, *Preacher* #1's dip is minuscule, but it signals the book's price has leveled. It's hit the so-called "plateau" at which people will only grab *Preacher* #1 if it's deeply discounted.

Otherwise, it's available at much cheaper levels in reprint volumes.

• **THE SANDMAN #1** (DC Comics): *Sandman* was the most successful "sophisticated" comic ever, but the title ended in 1996 and has been (excuse the pun) *endlessly* reprinted. It'll never be worthless, but *Sandman* #1 finally saw its first big drop.

• **STAR WARS: DARK EMPIRE #1** (Dark Horse): Lo, we are saturated. While the old Marvel *Star Wars* comics enjoyed a renaissance in 1997, most Dark Horses went down in price. Reason: Dark Horse pumped the market full of new "Star Wars" titles, seriously increasing the supply. The Marvel stuff is older, rarer and has been only lightly reprinted.

• **WITCHBLADE #1** (Top Cow/Image): Fans are rabid for *Witchblade* #1, and it surged from $20 to $35 in 1997. *Witchblade*, like *Preacher*, could "plateau" soon, since you can buy a reprint in the first *Witchblade Collected Edition* or the just-released *Witchblade Deluxe Edition*. But *Witchblade* #1 will still go like crazy—at reduced prices.

Trends of 1997

• **BAD NEWS:** Cover prices kept climbing. Wanna get all 13 issues of *Batman: The Long Halloween* at cover price? It's a mere $43. High prices keep bruising readers, as the iron rule of publishing tells us that the higher the price, the fewer the readers. And however you slice it, there were fewer comic buyers in 1997. Escalating prices was a major reason. The comic industry definitely lost some of its business in 1997.

• **GOOD NEWS:** The broad middle road is getting stronger. Books like DC's *Starman* and Marvel's *Incredible Hulk* actually increased in readership in a year where the big guns lost ground. And new titles like Marvel's *Alpha Flight* and DC's *Resurrection Man* gained solid, consistent readership from launches in 1997. Apparently, the market is much more than just Batman and X-Men these days.

• **MORE GOOD NEWS:** Commitment to books is growing. With the "Heroes Return" titles that Marvel relaunched in November, the publisher signed most of the creators to lengthy contracts. Most creators anywhere are signing on for hitches of one year at the minimum. Low creator turnover means more stability for those books, and ultimately more back-issue stability. W

If last year's experience has taught Wizard *Price Guide Manager Lars Pearson one thing, it's to buy high, sell low. Or was that the other way around?*

Wizard's Top 10 Writers

Boba Martin
1 **Grant Morrison**
JLA, The Invisibles

Paul Schiraldi
2 **Mark Waid**
Ka-Zar, Captain America

3 **Garth Ennis**
Preacher, Hitman

Paul Schiraldi
4 **Peter David**
Hulk, Aquaman

Paul Schiraldi
5 **Kurt Busiek**
Astro City; upcoming: Avengers

6 **Joe Kelly**
Deadpool, X-Men

J. Schuyler
7 **Scott Lobdell**
Uncanny X-Men, Fantastic Four

8 **Steven T. Seagle**
Alpha Flight, Uncanny X-Men

Al Ortega
9 **James Robinson**
Starman

Paul Schiraldi
10 **Frank Miller**
Sin City

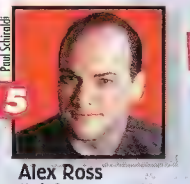
Wizard's Top 10 Artists*

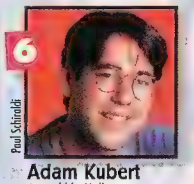
1 **Michael Turner**
Witchblade

Paul Schiraldi
2 **Joe Madureira**
upcoming: *Battle Chasers*

Paul Schiraldi
3 **Jim Lee**
Divine Right

Jim McHugh
4 **Marc Silvestri**
The Darkness

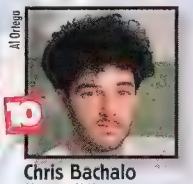

Paul Schiraldi
5 **Alex Ross**
Uncle Sam


Paul Schiraldi
6 **Adam Kubert**
Incredible Hulk

C. Blankenhorn
7 **Andy Kubert**
Ka-Zar

Al Ortega
8 **Carlos Pacheco**
X-Men

9 **J. Scott Campbell**
upcoming: *Danger Girl*


Al Ortega
10 **Chris Bachalo**
Uncanny X-Men

***Pencilers and painters**

***Wizard*'s Top 10 Professionals lists are derived from a nationwide retailer survey.**

BURIED TREASURE

KABUKI: FEAR THE REAPER

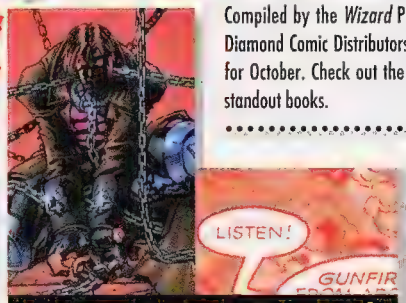
Now that *Kabuki* has hit it big with a new #1 launch at Image Comics, people are looking for her first appearance—in *Kabuki: Fear the Reaper*.

The sinuous story of identity crisis and Japanese politics had always won creator David Mack critical acclaim, but only when he moved to Image did the new *Kabuki* suddenly gain new readers in droves. *Kabuki: Fear the Reaper*, on the other hand, is not available in droves. It's a Caliber Press release of 1994 with a tiny print run. Hmmm. New, increased demand and low supply. Sound like a classic recipe for a price spike? The motto of the assassin Kabuki is "Little Sister is Watching You." That's never been more true than it is today. ■ *LP*

WIZARD TOP 100

The highest-ordered comic books for the month of OCTOBER.

Compiled by the *Wizard* Price Guide staff, and working off the data supplied by Diamond Comic Distributors, the following is a listing of the highest-ordered comics for October. Check out the column on the right for an explanation of this month's standout books.



1. Uncanny X-Men #350 (Marvel)
2. X-Men #70 (Marvel)
3. Heroes Reborn: The Return #1 (Marvel)
4. Spawn #67 (Image)
5. Heroes Reborn: The Return #2 (Marvel)
6. Heroes Reborn: The Return #4 (Marvel)
7. Heroes Reborn: The Return #3 (Marvel)
8. Witchblade #18 (Top Cow/Image)
9. Wolverine #119 (Marvel)
10. JLA #13 (DC)
11. Wolverine: Days of Future Past #1 (Marvel)
12. The Darkness #9 (Top Cow/Image)
13. Curse of the Spawn #14 (McFarlane/Image)
14. Generation X #33 (Marvel)
15. The Creech #1 (McFarlane/Image)
16. X-Man #33 (Marvel)
17. X-Force #72 (Marvel)
18. X-Men Unlimited #17 (Marvel)
19. X-Factor #140 (Marvel)
20. Cable #49 (Marvel)
21. Gen13 #24 (WildStorm/Image)
22. Incredible Hulk #459 (Marvel)
23. Ascension #2 (Top Cow/Image)
24. Divine Right #2 (WildStorm/Image)
25. Amazing Spider-Man #429 (Marvel)
26. Gambit #4 (Marvel)
27. Excalibur #115 (Marvel)
28. New Mutants #2 (Marvel)
29. Alpha Flight #5 (Marvel)
30. Peter Parker: Spider-Man #86 (Marvel)
31. Superman #130 (DC)
32. Unlimited Access #1 (Marvel)
33. Spectacular Spider-Man #252 (Marvel)
34. KISS: The Psycho Circus #4 (Image)
35. Superman: The Man of Steel #74 (DC)
36. Action Comics #740 (DC)
37. Adventures of Superman #553 (DC)
38. Batman #549 (DC)
39. Sensational Spider-Man #22 (Marvel)
40. Tangent Comics—Green Lantern #1 (DC)
41. Tangent Comics—The Joker #1 (DC)
42. Deadpool #11 (Marvel)
43. Tangent Comics—The Flash #1 (DC)
44. Batman: The Long Halloween #13 (DC)
45. Kitty Pryde: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. #1 (Marvel)
46. Xena: Warrior Princess #0 (Topps)
47. Quicksilver #2 (Marvel)
48. Tangent Comics—Nightwing #1 (DC)
49. Detective Comics #716 (DC)
50. Tangent Comics—The Atom #1 (DC)
51. Batman/Predator III: Blood Ties #2 (DC)
52. Tangent Comics—The Secret Six #1 (DC)
53. Tangent Comics—Sea Devils #1 (DC)
54. Tangent Comics—Doom Patrol #1 (DC)
55. Tangent Comics—Metal Men #1 (DC)
56. Thunderbolts #9 (Marvel)
57. Green Lantern #93 (DC)
58. Gen13 Bootleg #12 (WildStorm/Image)
59. Gen13 Interactive #1 (WildStorm/Image)
60. Preacher #32 (Vertigo/DC)
61. Gen13 3-D Special #1 (WildStorm/Image)
62. Sabretooth (Marvel)
63. Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #101 (DC)
64. Supergirl #16 (DC)
65. The Tenth #2 (Image)
66. Neil Gaiman & Charles Vess' Stardust #1 (Vertigo/DC)
67. Nightwing #15 (DC)
68. Lady Death: Death Becomes Her #0 (Chaos!)
69. The Flash #132 (DC)
70. The X-Files #35 (Topps)
71. Batman: Shadow of the Bat #69 (DC)
72. Maverick #4 (Marvel)
73. Star Wars: Dark Force Rising #6 (Dark Horse)
74. Ka-Zar #8 (Marvel)
75. Catwoman #52 (DC)
76. Wonder Woman #128 (DC)
77. Man-Thing #1 (Marvel)
78. WildC.A.T.s #43 (WildStorm/Image)
79. Robin #48 (DC)
80. Heroes for Hire #6 (Marvel)
81. Shi/Vampirella #1 (Crusade)
82. S. Wars: T. of the Jedi—F. of the S. Empire #5 (D.H.)
83. Batman/Phantom Stranger #1 (DC)
84. Elektra #13 (Marvel)
85. DV8 #12 (WildStorm/Image)
86. Arcanum #6 (Top Cow/Image)
87. Mage: The Hero Defined #4 (Image)
88. Marvel Team-Up #4 (Marvel)
89. Silver Surfer #134 (Marvel)
90. Starman #37 (DC)
91. Shi: The Series #3 (Crusade)
92. S. Wars: X-Wing R.S.—In T. Empire's Service #3 (D.H.)
93. Kabuki #1 (Image)
94. Azrael #36 (DC)
95. Daredevil #370 (Marvel)
96. Aquaman #39 (DC)
97. What If...? #103 (Marvel)
98. StormWatch #1 (WildStorm/Image)
99. Venom: Finale #2 (Marvel)
100. DV8 vs. Black Ops #1 (WildStorm/Image)

'REBORN' REAPS REWARDS!

• ***Heroes Reborn: The Return* #1-#4** (Nos. 3, 5-7): Fact: The four issues of this mini-series were supposed to sell well. Fact: Fans already dig *The Return* writer Peter David, and artist Salvador Larroca is a fast-rising star. Fact: With all that to live up to, *Return* actually sold monster-well, exceeding all expectations and trailing only the X-Men titles and *Spawn*. (And fact: retailers ordered more of #4 because they knew more readers would want the big, climactic issue.)

• ***Witchblade* #18** (No. 8) and ***Wolverine* #119** (No. 9): Huh? *Witchblade* #18 beat *Wolverine* #119? When a mainstay like the ol' Canucklehead is beaten by the likes of *Witchblade*, it just goes to show ya that people are still flocking to Top Cow. The Darkness/Witchblade "Family Ties" crossover gave this book a lift.

• ***The Creech* #1** (No. 15): Here's proof that creators sell books. All we know about The Creech is that it's some hulking brute that "stalks those who were sent to hunt it." But the book's written and drawn by Greg Capullo, who pencils that kinda-sorta huge book called *Spawn*. People dig Capullo; therefore they order *The Creech*.

• **Tangent Comics** (Nos. 40, 41, 43, 48, 50, 52-55): DC's one-shot "Tangent" books actually scored pretty high, given that they took place in a totally new universe with no promise of a Tangent comic ever appearing again. The key to the books' sales appeared to be name recognition: The high-profile *Green Lantern* and *Joker* led the pack, while the obscure *Doom Patrol* and *Metal Men* finished last.

• ***Man-Thing* #1** (No. 77): This was a decent showing for Marvel's newest monthly, and a bit of a surprise, when taking into account Man-Thing's less-than-successful sales history and the fact that Manny looks like something Liquid Dran-o was invented to cure. It would appear that Marvel revivals are hot, and readers were enticed by the cool promo art from penciler Liam Sharp.

• ***Kabuki* #1** (No. 93): On a chart weighted down with Tangent titles and a "Heroes Reborn" mini, *Kabuki* #1's No. 93 rank is mind-bending. Creator David Mack has always gotten kudos for his heart-bursting story of a deadly Japanese assassin, but *Kabuki* never had sales *oomph!* like this before. And if you add sales amounts from the Jim Steranko-drawn *Kabuki* #1 variant, the title actually comes in at No. 82! It appears the new launch has finally brought *Kabuki* to the big time.

ATTENTION COMIC BOOK RETAILERS:

If you're a retailer who would like to participate in our compiling of the *Wizard* Top 100 (and be a candidate for special incentives), please write to us at the address below.

Top 100 Coordinator
c/o Wizard Press
151 Wells Ave.
Congers, NY 10920-2064
or e-mail us at: **WizardTGTC@aol.com**

BULL PEN

Former Mort of the Month Kite Man welcomes you to the *Wizard* Fun Section!

C.B.I.Q.

Games, puzzles and stuff that'll tickle your tummy with the taste of nuts and honey

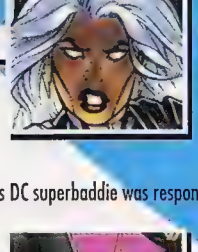
comic book intelligence quotient

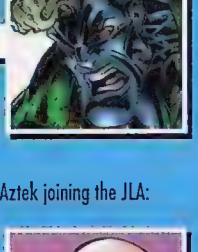
Hey, welcome to the special ALL-VISUAL edition of *Wizard*'s non-award-winning "CBIQ." All you gotta do is pick which pictures answer the questions asked and BAMMO!, you win nothing! Here's how to grade your knowledge:

SCORE	RANK
0 0	**Loser:** You contribute nothing to conversations and no one will miss you when you die.
1-3-5	**Wanker:** People tolerate your presence just so that by watching you they can feel better about themselves.
6-8-12	**Second-best:** Story of your life. Why bother talking about how close you came to getting them all right when someone better than you actually did?
1313	**Geek:** You obviously read way too many comics. Odds are you will die alone with a lifetime of regret.

answers on page 262

1. Which X-Man slapped around Bastion at the end of that mutant-stompin' "Zero Tolerance" storyline?

A 

B 

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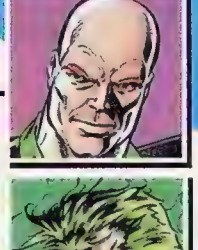
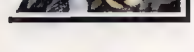
D 

2. This DC superbaddie was responsible for Aztek joining the JLA:

A 

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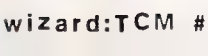
C 

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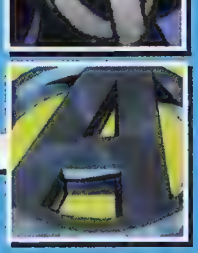
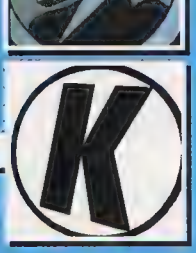
3. What symbol currently graces the top of Four Freedoms Plaza?

A 

B 

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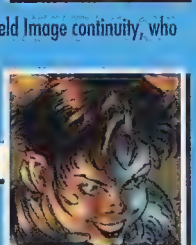
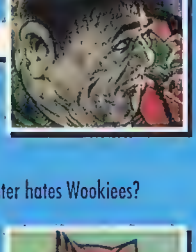
D 

4. In Post-*Crisis*...ooop, we mean Post-Liefeld Image continuity, who killed Spawn?

A

B 

C

D

5. Which "Empire Strikes Back" bounty hunter hates Wookiees?

A

B

C

D

6. Which superhero threw Dr. Doom into the villain Onslaught, causing the Doommeister to show up in that "Heroes Reborn" universe?

A

B

C

D

7. This super-Russkie recently shot Daredevil in the chest:

A

B

C

D

Everett Collection

8. At the end of DC's incredibly boring and insultingly bad *Genesis* crossover story, who became one with the Wall?

A

B

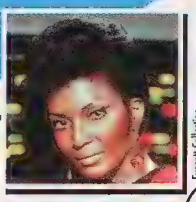
C

D

Everett Collection

9. Who had the hots for "Star Trek"'s Spock?

A

B 

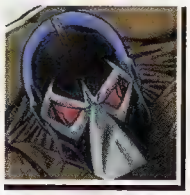
C

D

Everett Collection

10. Which Bat-baddie wants the Dark Knight to nail his daughter so she'll produce a suitable heir?

A

B 

C

D

11. Who created the blue containment suit that Supes donned when he became that lame "Electro-Superman"?

A

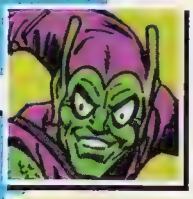
B

C

D

Everett Collection

12. Which Spider-Man villain WASN'T revived in 1997 to once again plague the wall-crawler (AND plague fans who are tired of regurgitated, hacked-out stories)?

A 

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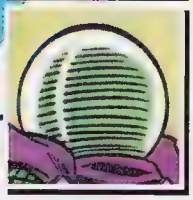
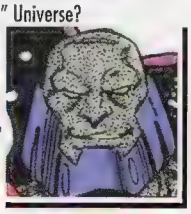
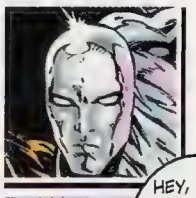
C 

D

13. Who was NOT a herald of Galactus in that weird "Heroes Reborn" Universe?

A 

B 

C

D

Al Ortega

BULL PEN

Happy Whatever

Sooo…during this merry holiday season, what do the ever-cheerful *Wizard* staffers dread most?

Greg Orlando, copy editor: "Eating that same damn turkey my family's been eating for the past 27 years and choking back tears of desperation when asked, 'How is it?'"

Doug Goldstein, specials editor: "The loneliness…the infinite loneliness."

Pat McCallum, editor-in-chief: "'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' reruns. That scene with the Bumble coming to grab Rudolph and his pals as they try and get away on their ice-raft…I still wake up peeing myself and screaming after watching it."

Jennifer Cavallo, administrative assistant: "The asses who charge like three dollars and 50 cents on their credit cards while I'm waiting on line behind them."

Jim McLauchlin, senior writer: "Family."

Dan Reilly, art assistant: "Getting the right toys for my very picky nephews and niece so I don't become 'The Crappy Uncle.'"

Andrew Kardon, assistant editor: "Santa-Winos on every street corner. All I want to do is shop. Leave me alone!"

Joe Yanarella, senior managing editor: "Bills. And yams."

Steve Blackwell, design manager: "Driving. I've got 21 people in my immediate family, none of whom live near each other."

Marc Wilkofsky, copy editor: "Battling the bitter cold and hip-deep snowdrifts just so I can be a part of tasteless commercialism."

Top row (from left): Steve Blackwell, Pat McCallum, Andrew Kardon, Tesslyn Pandarakalam, Cindy Emmert
Middle row (from left): Joe Yanarella, Brian Cunningham, Jennifer Cavallo, Bob Marshall, Jim McLauchlin, Lars Pearson
Bottom row (from left): Pete Flood, Greg Orlando, Matthew Senreich, Marc Wilkofsky, Arlene So, Phil Colligan, Keith Williams
Reclining: Dan Reilly

WIZARD TOP TEN

Top 10 things we wish had happened in 1997

10. For a giant flock of flying monkeys—not unlike those seen in "The Wizard of Oz"—to have descended on Hollywood and beaten Joel Schumacher with hammers the day BEFORE "Batman & Robin" began filming.
9. *Unlimited Access III: Welcome to Penthouse Comix.*
8. For experiments in wormhole technology to have gone awry and WHOOOSH!, France gets transported to Venus.
7. *Voyager* exploded.
6. Washington decreed: Free pie for all *Wizard* staffers.
5. For that guy from "Sling Blade" to have killed all those S#@&ing toy hoarders who make it impossible to buy a new Star Wars figure until it's been out for three months.
4. Heck, free pie for everybody!
3. The Supreme Court ruled the line-item veto unconstitutional.
2. Greedo didn't shoot first.
1. Midgets in clown shoes and wielding caulk-guns full of cheese stormed the United Nations and brought the free world to its knees!

CONTEST WINNERS

CHAOS!, *Wizard* #72: Ross Lemons, Orland Park, Ill.
HBO/SPAWN, #72: Richard Wise, Gaffney, S.C.

C.B.I.Q. answers...

from pages 260-261

1. A	4. B	7. C	10. A	13. D
2. B	5. B	8. A	11. C	
3. B	6. B	9. C	12. C	

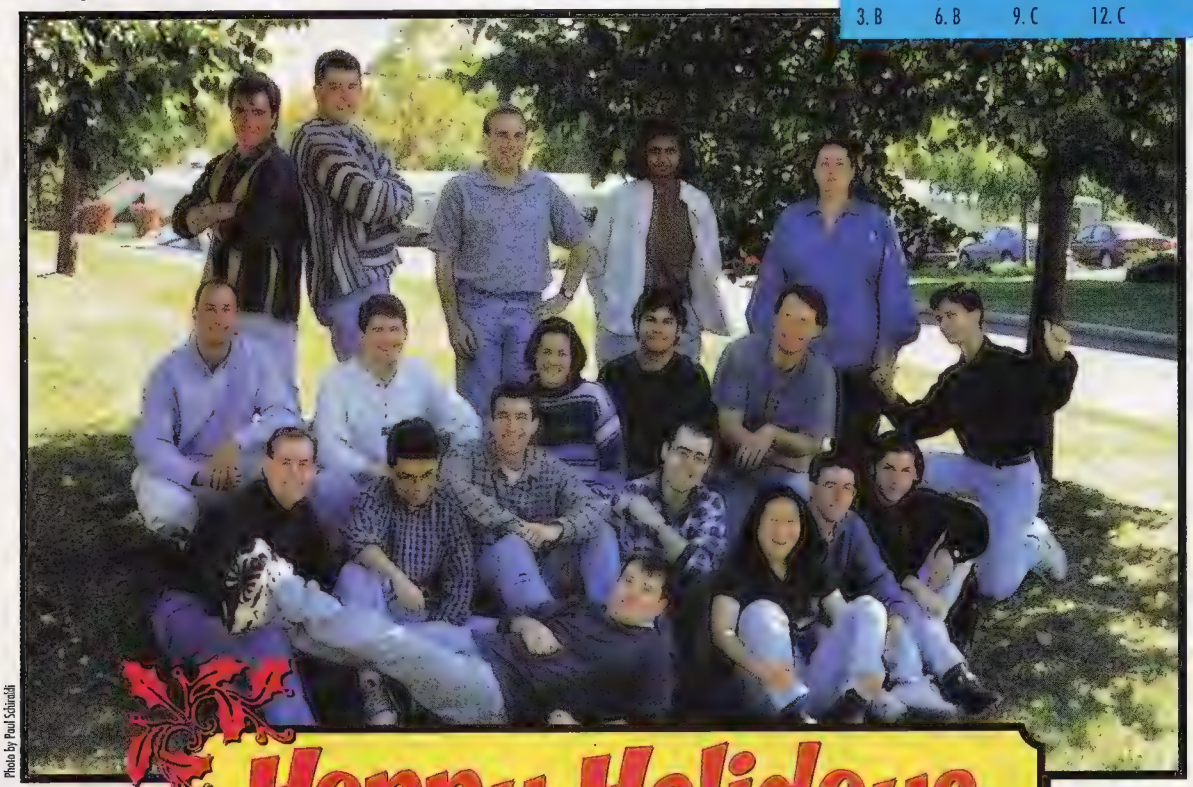


Photo by Paul Schiraldi

Happy Holidays
from the Wizard staff!

The Next Wave in COMICS

WIZARD #78

Mega-Jam cover by Madureira Campbell & Ramos

SEE IT HERE FIRST

Joe Madureira (X-Men)
J. Scott Campbell (Gen13)
& Humberto Ramos (DV8, Ash)
Unveil their new heroes in a roundtable interview!

cover by Steve Skroce!

BOBA FETT 1/2 Comic Offer!

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BY PETER SANDERSON

X-MEN EXPLOSION

Claremont and Byrne begin historic run 20 years ago

THE GOOD NEWS: *Uncanny X-Men* was about to go monthly. The bad news: Marvel had to fill the void left by its departing star artist.

When it was relaunched in 1975, the bimonthly *Uncanny* was steadily climbing Marvel's sales charts to the point of being awarded monthly status. But "New" X-Men co-creator/penciler Dave Cockrum conceded he was feeling burnt-out by the book's bimonthly schedule and left with #107.

Enter John Byrne, a newcomer champing at the bit to get the X-Men. "I had made this known; I wanted this in the worst way," Byrne recalls. The young artist teamed with series writer Chris Claremont and finished a three-part story begun by Cockrum in *Uncanny* #108, cover-dated December 1977. "Chris was always trying to get me work," says Byrne of his then-partner on *Iron Fist* and *Marvel Team-Up*. "It was very nice of him."

And what was seen as a risky move for the up-and-coming book turned out to be one of the greatest collaborations in comics history.

"It's scary and humbling to realize that when John and I set out to conclude a crackling good story, we were planting the seeds of a revolution in the industry," Claremont says today. "[We] defined the shape of comics for the next 20 years—the whole synergy of team books, of art styles and writing styles. A significant amount of Marvel's canon derives from the work John and I did during those three years."

"We defined the shape of comics for the next 20 years—the whole synergy of team books, of art styles and writing styles."

—CHRIS CLAREMONT

And that's no overstatement. Not only did their efforts on *Uncanny X-Men* catapult Marvel's mutants to the top of the sales charts, but their success spawned an entire family of mutant-related spinoffs over the course of the next 15 years.

Their collaborative magic truly clicked when Byrne began co-plotting stories with Claremont with issue #113. Their synergy shaped storylines that have become milestones in comics history. Most remembered is "The Dark Phoenix Saga" (*Uncanny* #129-#137), which saw Jean Grey become a threat to the entire cosmos, and meet a tragic death, shocking a readership that was up till then convinced that major Marvel heroes couldn't die. (Many years later, readers learned a doppelgänger of Jean, died.) Following that in #141-#142, the nightmarish future presented in "Days of Future Past" has had even greater repercussions; the storyline depicts a near future in which mutants are hunted down and confined to concentration camps—a future that the X-Men still can't seem to shake.

Byrne's co-plotting benefited one X-Man in particular: Wolverine. Together, Byrne and Claremont gave Logan much of the personality familiar to us today: his ruthless willingness to kill, his capacity for love and loyalty, and his sardonic outlook on life. Wolverine's popularity sparked a new wave of morally darker heroes, which still permeate comics today.

While an existing hero like Wolverine was given new life, so too were engaging characters the two created. Major players like Kitty Pryde, Alpha Flight, the Hellfire Club, Sebastian Shaw, the White Queen, Dazzler, Rachel Summers, Senator Robert Kelly and Proteus are all products of the twosome.

Disagreements over stories and characterization ultimately ended their collaboration with 1981's *Uncanny X-Men* #143. Byrne sought a solo career and found further success as an artist *and* writer; he chronicled *Fantastic Four* for five years afterward and gained national media attention revamping DC's Superman in 1986. Claremont remained with the X-Men for another 10 years, steering the book along the top of the sales charts and ultimately leading to 1991's phenomenally successful spinoff, titled simply *X-Men*.

"[The collaboration] laid the foundations of our careers," sums up Claremont. "It was an invaluable experience and some of the most fun in my career. I was sorry to see it end." W

1977 1976 75 74 73 72 71 70 69 68 67 1966 1965 1964 1963 1962 1961 1960 1959 1958 1957 1956 1955

DATELINE: DECEMBER 1977

"Saturday Night Fever" shot John Travolta to movie stardom...America tuned into "Laverne and Shirley" every Tuesday night...Debby Boone's "You Light Up My Life" capped its 10-week run as *Billboard*'s #1 song.

She doesn't like them.
She doesn't trust them.

She may be one of them.

CHASE

Written by **D. Curtis Johnson**.
Illustrated by **J.H. Williams III** and **Mick Gray**.

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